

Wall Paintings from the Baptistry at Stobi, Macedonia, and Early Depictions of Christ and the Evangelists

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An important new set of baptistry paintings, found at Stobi in 1971, has much to tell us about the iconography of Christ and the evangelists in late antiquity.¹ Study of these figural scenes has determined that the paintings are of great importance not only for their intrinsic beauty, which is considerable in some cases, but also for the information they provide on the development of Christian iconography, for their relation to imperial art of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, and for their contribution to the general study of baptistry decoration. Technical studies of the paintings and the pigments have provided further information on the raw materials used in their creation and on the nature of painting workshops in the provinces of the Roman Empire.

Found in many fragments in the ruined baptistry (Figs. 1–4), the paintings required

¹The Stobi Excavation Project, a joint Yugoslav-American project, involved active fieldwork at the site from 1970 to 1980. The American director was James Wiseman, Boston University, and the Yugoslav directors were Djordje Mano-Zissi and Blaga Aleksova, University of Skopje. Publication of the results of fieldwork and subsequent research, by Princeton University Press, is now in progress. Volume one, *Stobi: The Hellenistic and Late Roman Pottery*, by Virginia Anderson-Stojanović, appeared in 1992.

Preliminary reports on the baptistry can be found in J. Wiseman and Dj. Mano-Zissi, "Excavations at Stobi, 1971," *AJA* 76 (1972), 420–24; J. Wiseman and Dj. Mano-Zissi, "Excavations at Stobi, 1972," *AJA* 77 (1973), 391–403, figs. 13, 14; J. Wiseman and Dj. Mano-Zissi, "Excavations at Stobi, 1973–1974," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 1 (1974), 142–46, figs. 30, 31; and J. Wiseman, "Stobi in Yugoslavian Macedonia: Archaeological Excavations and Research, 1977–1978," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 5 (1978), 408–9, fig. 15. Detailed discussions of the building's architectural context can be found in R. Kolarik, "The Floor Mosaics of Stobi and Their Balkan Context" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982), and in C. Snively, "Early Christian Basilicas of Stobi: A Study of Form, Function, and Location" (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, 1979). A complete catalogue and discussion of the wall paintings from the baptistry can be found in my dissertation, C. Hemans, "Late Antique Wall Painting from Stobi, Yugoslavia" (Ph.D. diss., Indiana University, 1987).

Many thanks are due to project members: Frederick Hemans, who provided many hours of help, and James and Lucy Wiseman, who encouraged this work. James Wiseman provided many helpful comments on the manuscript and assisted in locating items from the Stobi photo archives. Both of the peer reviewers made many invaluable suggestions. I recognized one reviewer as my colleague, Carolyn Snively, and she has given me further suggestions for improvement, for which I am most grateful. I would also like to thank my Macedonian colleague, Djordje Djordjievski, for his work reconstructing the paintings both in reality and in a superb watercolor rendition. Thanks are also due to the Research and Creative Endeavors Committee of the State University of New York, Potsdam, which provided funding for electron microscope analysis of paint pigment samples.

years of painstaking reconstruction, a process complicated by the presence, in many cases, of two layers of paint.² Two substantial areas, and numerous smaller sections, have been reconstructed; these contain three depictions of Christ and representations of two evangelists. One image of Christ, from the east wall, appears in a scene including a building and several other figures. The largest reconstructed section comes from one of the baptistery's small semidomes, which were set in each corner. This semidome contains a portrait of the evangelist Matthew, identified by an inscription. The paintings, those from the east wall in particular, show considerable stylistic resemblances to art of the period of Theodosius I the Great, and this study attempts to demonstrate that on this basis they should be assigned to the period of his reign (379–395) or slightly later. Although there is some archaeological evidence to support this position, the building is still being studied, and it is not possible to be definitive about dates at this time.

The building history of this baptistery is very complex and difficult to determine, for the structure underwent several remodelings and modifications. In its first phase, the building was associated with a basilica known as the Early Church, which dates, on the evidence of coins, to the period after the 360s/370s A.D. (Fig. 3).³ Pottery from a use level in the Early Church gives a date in the fourth century; destruction debris that filled in the Early Church contained pottery from the late fourth century.⁴ Built on the south side of the Early Church, the baptistery is constructed of mortared fieldstones and is approximately 10 m square. However, the baptistery may not be contemporaneous with the first phase of the Early Church, but somewhat later, for the materials and methods used in its construction differ markedly from those of the Early Church. The upper walls of the Early Church were constructed of mudbrick, unlike those of the baptistery, and different mortars were used in the stonework of each structure. There were at least two phases of the piscina itself. Fill over a pipe that probably led to the earlier piscina contained two coins of Theodosius I, dated to 383–392.⁵ The baptistery was originally equipped with an ambulatory; remains of the ambulatory walls were found during excavation and can be clearly seen on the state plan. The roofing system has been much debated and has not yet been determined.⁶

²C. Hemans, "Fresco Reconstruction at Ancient Stobi," *Context* 3.1–2 (1983), 12–14, published by Boston University Center for Archaeological Studies. During excavation, careful records were made in field notebooks of the findspots of wall painting fragments; these were of great help during the reconstruction process.

³Wiseman, "Stobi," 405–6.

⁴Anderson-Stojanović, *Stobi*, 169–74. Dates for the Early Church itself are also problematic. Excavation of the building has continued under B. Aleksova, who has published the following reports: B. Aleksova, "The Old Episcopal Basilica at Stobi—Excavations and Researches, 1981–1984," *Zbornik filozofski fakultet na univerzitetu—Skopje* (Skopje, 1985), 43–72, and "The Old Episcopal Basilica at Stobi," *ArchJug* (Belgrade) 22–23 (1982–83), 50–62.

⁵Wiseman, "Stobi," 408–9, fig. 15. Remains of an earlier piscina below the present one were discovered during excavation below the mosaic floor in 1977, as described in *Journal of Field Archaeology* 5 (1978), 411. One of the most interesting modifications of the baptistery consisted of the insertion of a large white marble *kantharos* into the wall of the piscina. Perhaps this modification was made to allow the baptism of infants; the piscina itself was still available for total immersion baptism in the latest phase of the basilica.

⁶The Early Church may have been a cathedral from its earliest construction phase (a bishop of Stobi attended the Council of Nicaea in 325). Recent publications on the churches in Dalmatia, however, have made it clear that a church need not be a cathedral in order to possess a baptistery. See P. Chevalier, *Salona II: Ecclesiae Dalmatiae*, I (Rome, 1995), 183. See also F. Hemans, "Late Antique Residences at Stobi, Yugoslavia" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1985); R. Kolarik, "Mosaics of the Early Church at Stobi," *DOP* 41 (1987),

Sometime after the middle of the fifth century the Early Church was demolished (its fallen wall paintings show the marks of a systematic destruction) and filled with debris to create a terrace about 4 m above the original floor level of the church. Pottery found in the destruction debris provides a date between the middle and third quarter of the fifth century.⁷ Upon the terrace rose a new church, known as the Episcopal Basilica. The new church adopted the old baptistery for its own, adding a staircase in green sandstone from its narthex down to the level of the baptistery. Construction of the terrace required the addition of a large retaining wall between the basilica and the baptistery. This was built over the north corridor of the ambulatory, leaving the remaining sections to be adapted into a sort of half-ambulatory (Figs. 2, 3).

On the interior, the baptistery's curved walls form an octagonal shape, in keeping with the numerological tradition of the times, as evidenced in many contemporary baptisteries.⁸ The octagon is formed by four curving walls at the corner, each containing a semidome, with walls of a more shallow curve between the semidomes. An octagonal piscina in the center once supported an elaborate superstructure of small columns in white marble. An almost complete set of architectural sculpture was found in the debris during excavation. Upon the floors, figural mosaics provided further scenes appropriate for a baptistery: harts drinking from *kantharoi* in two corners, and peacocks in the other two (Fig. 4). It is possible that the floor mosaics and architectural sculpture were added at the time the baptistery was adopted for use by the Episcopal Basilica. Cuttings along the bottom of the wall paintings, to accommodate the later mosaic, indicate that the plastered walls predate this remodeling.

Some wall paintings have been preserved in situ in the baptistery, on the lower parts of the walls and in the northwest semidome. Very little remains of the painted design: only a few painted lines, very much faded, can still be discerned. On the lower walls of the baptistery the design consists of linear patterns in imitation of opus sectile revetment, such as those that formed the decoration of the walls of the Early Church.⁹

Most of the baptistery paintings have been reconstructed from fragments found among the destruction debris. The largest section to be reconstructed, about 2.5 m high and 3.5 m wide, is from the northeast semidome. This section was covered with two layers of paint, of which the outer coat was in poor condition, flaking off very easily to expose parts of the painting beneath (Fig. 5). Painted upon this second layer of paint was

295–306; and the two articles by B. Aleksova cited in note 4 above. A considerable amount of wall and ceiling painting was found in the Early Church. See C. Hemans, "Fresco Reconstruction," and eadem, "Late Antique Wall Painting," 9–55. Wall paintings from the Early Church consist of imitation panels of opus sectile and a ceiling of illusionistic coffers (see below, note 49).

The state plan of the Episcopal Basilica, by F. Hemans, is published in J. Wiseman and Dj. Mano-Zissi, "Stobi: A City of Ancient Macedonia," *Journal of Field Archaeology* 3 (1976), 288–89, fig. 21. On the state plan the foundations of the original ambulatory can be clearly seen. On the roofing system, see W. B. Dinsmoor, "The Baptistery: Its Roofing and Related Problems," in *Studies in the Antiquities of Stobi*, II (Belgrade, 1975), 15–25. Dinsmoor proposed a dome for the first phase of the baptistery. More recent studies, by F. Hemans and others, as yet unpublished, seem to indicate that a dome is unlikely.

⁷Anderson-Stojanović, *Stobi*, 173. Coins beneath a first phase mosaic in the Episcopal Basilica provide a date of 425–450, thus suggesting a reliable *terminus post quem* for the construction of the first phase of the building.

⁸R. Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 4th ed. (Baltimore, Md., 1986), 95.

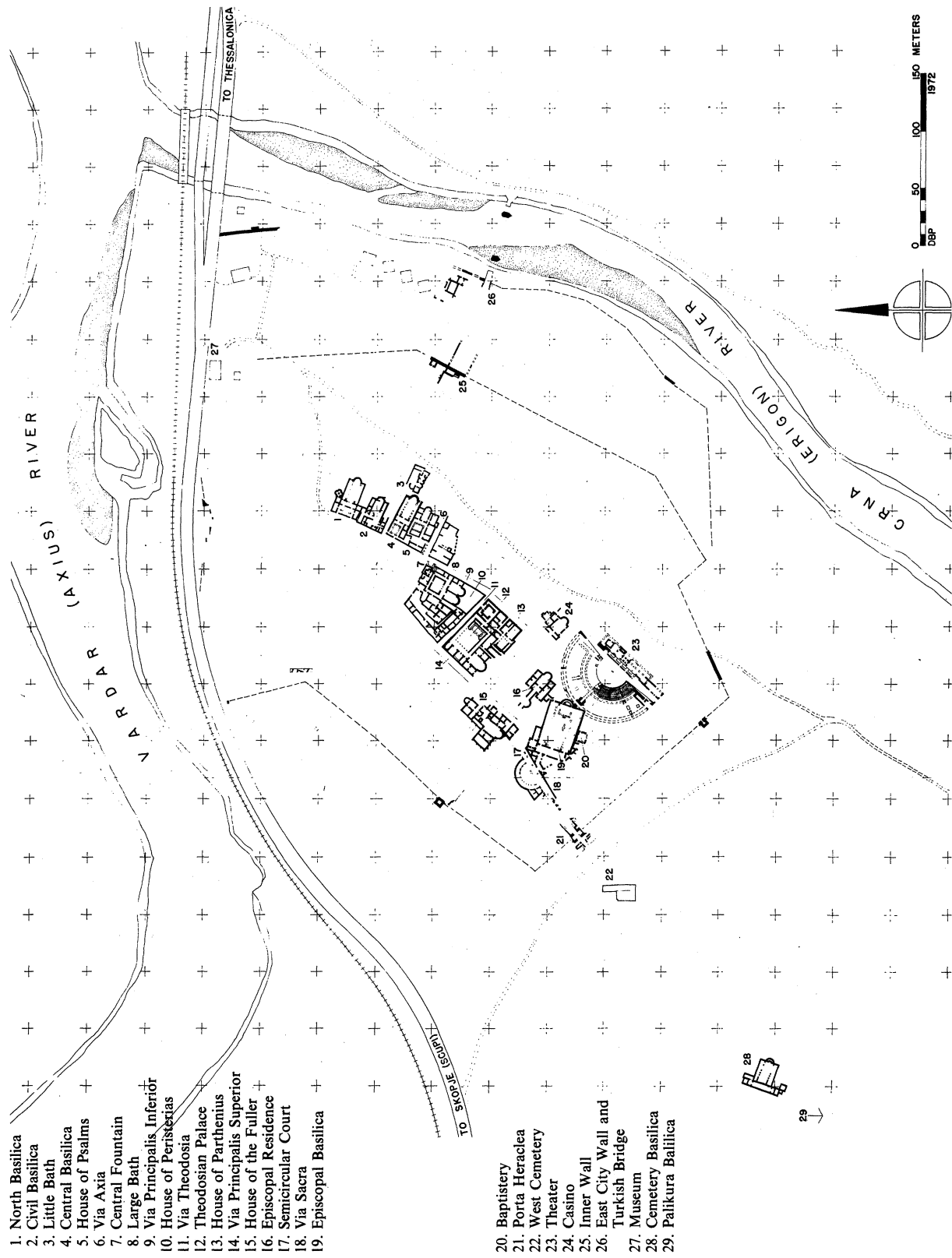
⁹C. Hemans, "Late Antique Wall Painting," 9–55.

a large red-orange cross adorned with white “jewels,” flanked by candelabra or flaming torches. Although at first no figures were identified as belonging to this second phase painting, one small head has now been identified (Fig. 6). It is painted on top of the outer coat added to cover the first phase paintings; it does not join directly into the reconstructed section of the semidome and so cannot at this time be associated with any scene. After careful documentation with photographs and drawings, the outer layer of paint was removed from the semidome with surgical scalpels.

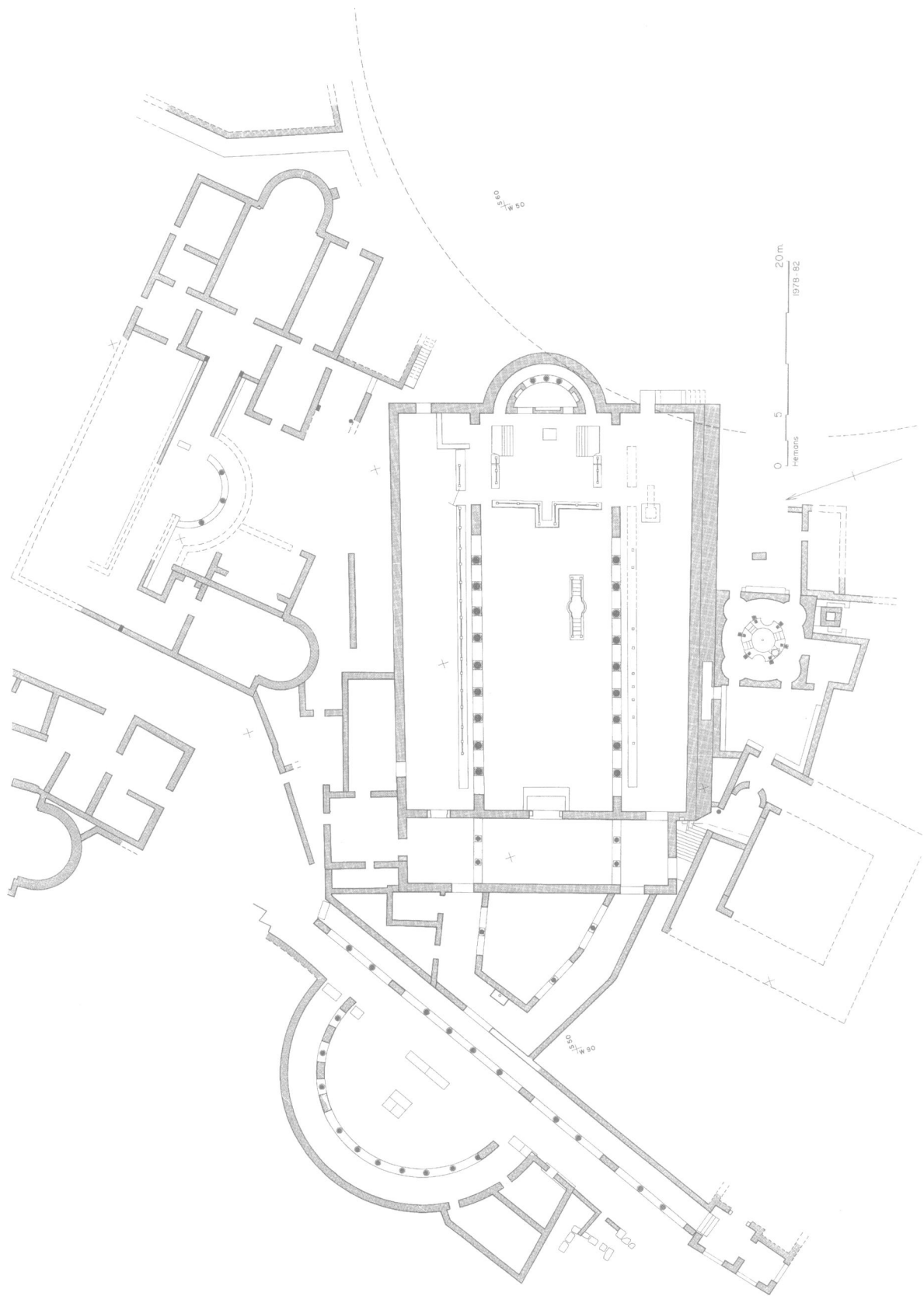
The outer layer of paint served admirably to preserve the very important painting underneath (Figs. 7–9). Dominating the scene is a large figure of the evangelist Matthew, who is identified by inscriptions above his head. He is located within an arched opening, indicated by reddish-purple lines on a pale purple background. On the right is a block projecting from the springpoint of the painted arch. The word ΕΥΑ [ΓΓΕ Λ] ΟC is painted in purple letters above the arch, while directly above the head of St. Matthew are preserved in white paint the letters MATΘEOC. Only the lower parts of the alpha and theta are preserved. A blue nimbus surrounds the head of the saint, blending with diagonal brush strokes into the purple ground on the left while forming a firm circular edge on the right.¹⁰ St. Matthew is portrayed in an almost frontal pose, his head turned very slightly to the right. While large areas of his face are missing, most of his eyes and nose are preserved, painted in brown on a beige background, with white overpainted highlights. His eyeballs, like those of all the other figures in the composition, are also overpainted in white. St. Matthew has brown hair streaked with gray at the temples and cut straight across his brow. His pointed brown beard, streaked with white, appears to be of medium length, neither very long nor closely cropped. The evangelist is raising his right hand, with two fingers extended in a gesture of benediction or *adlocutio*. In his left hand he holds his Gospel book; the top of his fingers can be seen as he supports the book from beneath. Nothing is preserved below this; it is therefore not possible to judge whether he is seated or standing. His clothing consists of a pale blue chlamys with a brown clavus or vertical stripe.

To the left of St. Matthew is preserved part of the face and upper body of a man with a short reddish-brown beard who is wearing a brown cloak. To the right of the evangelist is a group of figures of which five have been partly preserved. Flanking St. Matthew is a man who holds up his right hand in a gesture of presentation or obeisance toward the saint. His fingers are greatly elongated, with the finger joints indicated by short pairs of parallel lines. His hair, mustache, and beard are painted brown; some curls are visible at the left. His left eye is turned toward the saint. Very little is preserved below the neck. To the right is a beardless man, of whom only part of the left eye, nose, and mouth are preserved. Rather fine brush strokes characterize the modeling of this face. The next face on the right, almost complete, is that of a broad-faced, heavily jowled man who is turned away from St. Matthew. His hair forms a cap over his head, while a sideburn

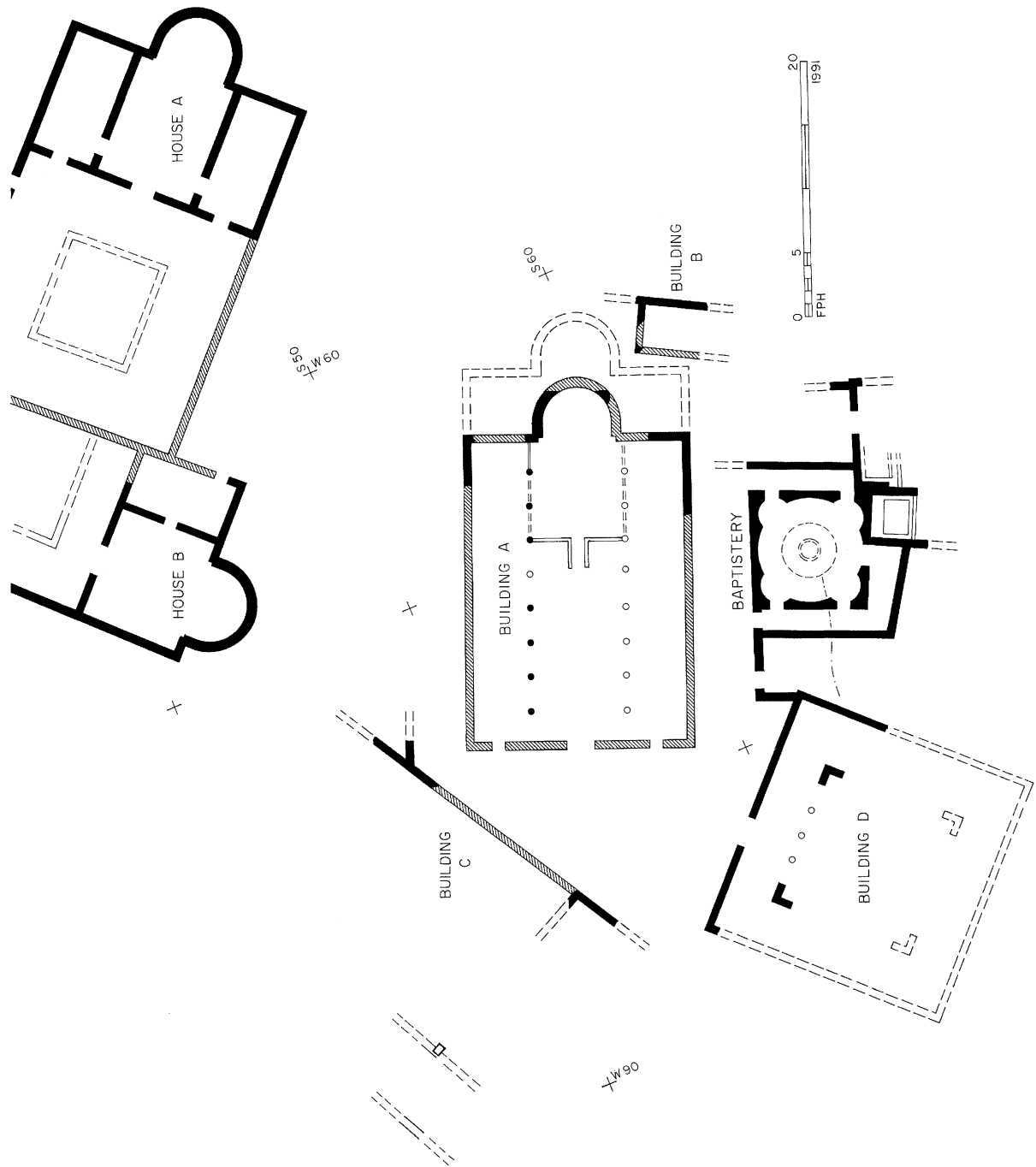
¹⁰The significance of the blue nimbus is difficult to ascertain. D. Korol, in his study of the 4th-century Via Latina catacomb painting discovered in 1955, remarks that early portraits of Christ were often nimbed in blue. At Stobi, Christ bears a golden nimbus, and the evangelists blue. Perhaps the distinction being made here is between the natures of God and man, with only the divine receiving the golden nimbus. See D. Korol, “Zum Bild der Vertreibung Adams und Evas in der Neuen Katakomben an der Via Latina und zur anthropomorphen Darstellung Gottvaters,” *JbAC* 22 (1979), 175–90.



1 Plan of the site of Stobi, Macedonia (surveyed and drawn by P. Huffman [1971] and D. Peck [1972], with additions by C. Erhorn [1973] and F. P. Hemans [1974])



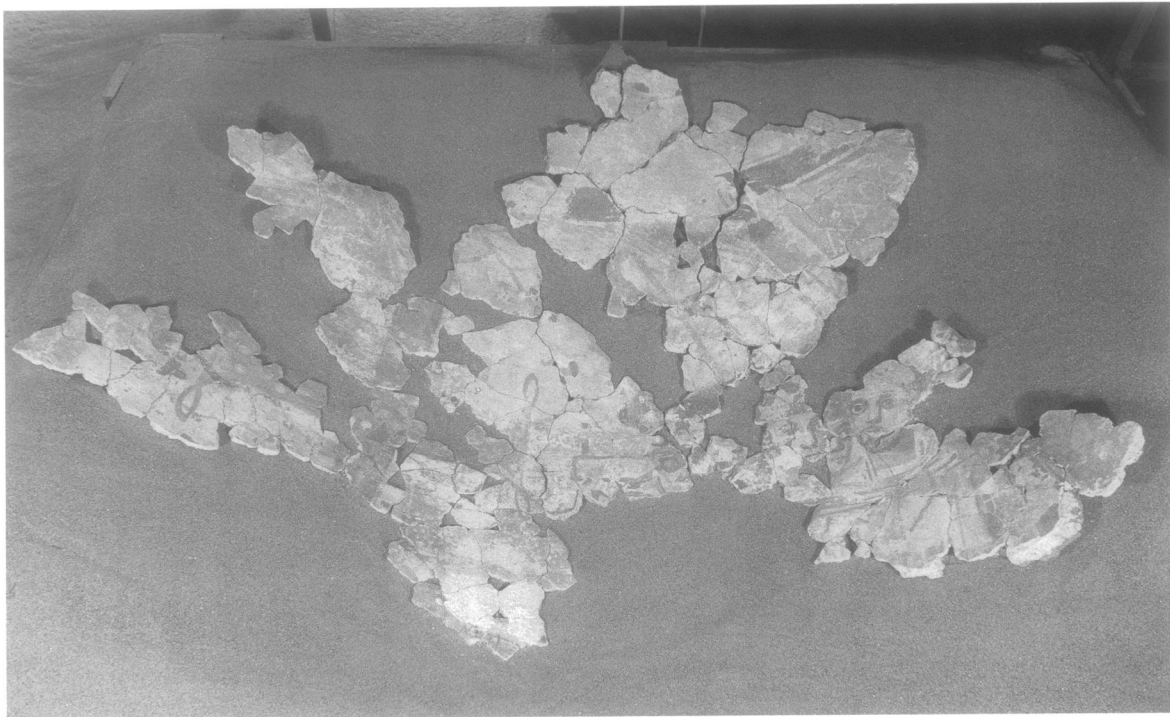
2 Restored plan of the Episcopal Basilica and the baptistery (plan by F. P. Hemans)



3 Plan of the Early Church ("Building A") and the baptistry (plan by F. P. Hemans)



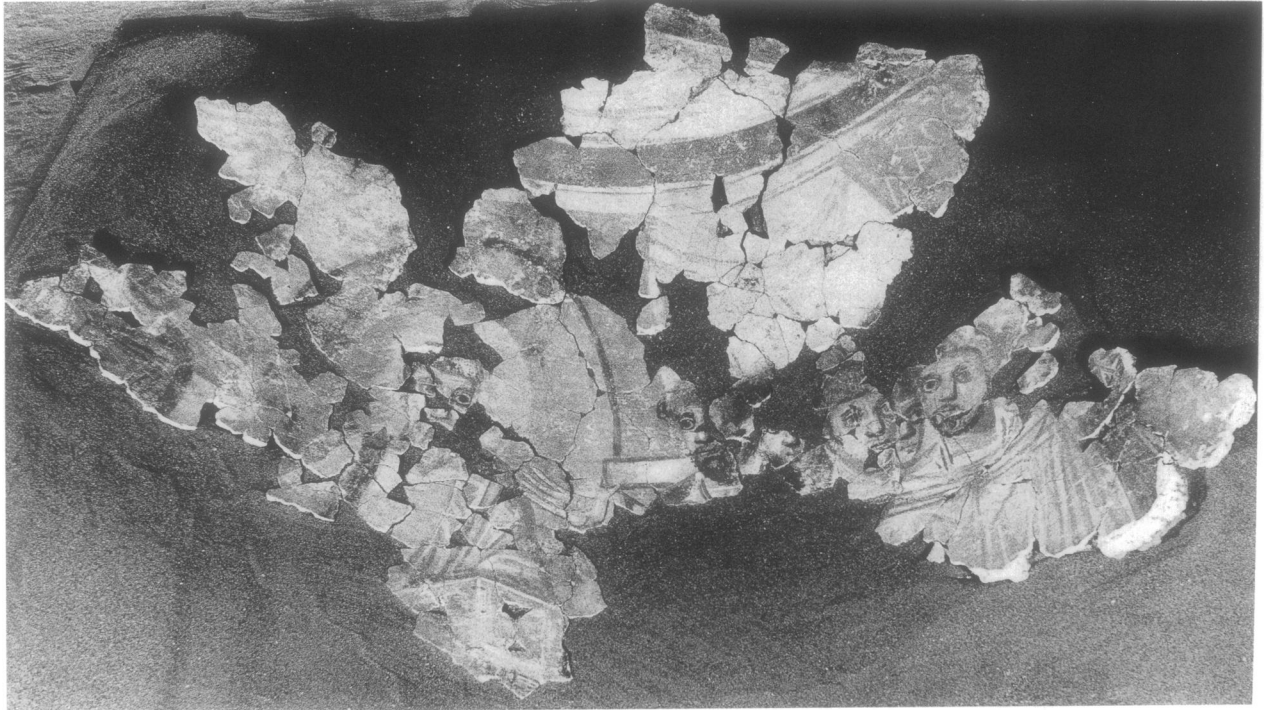
4 Baptistery after cleaning and restoration, showing piscina and mosaic floors (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



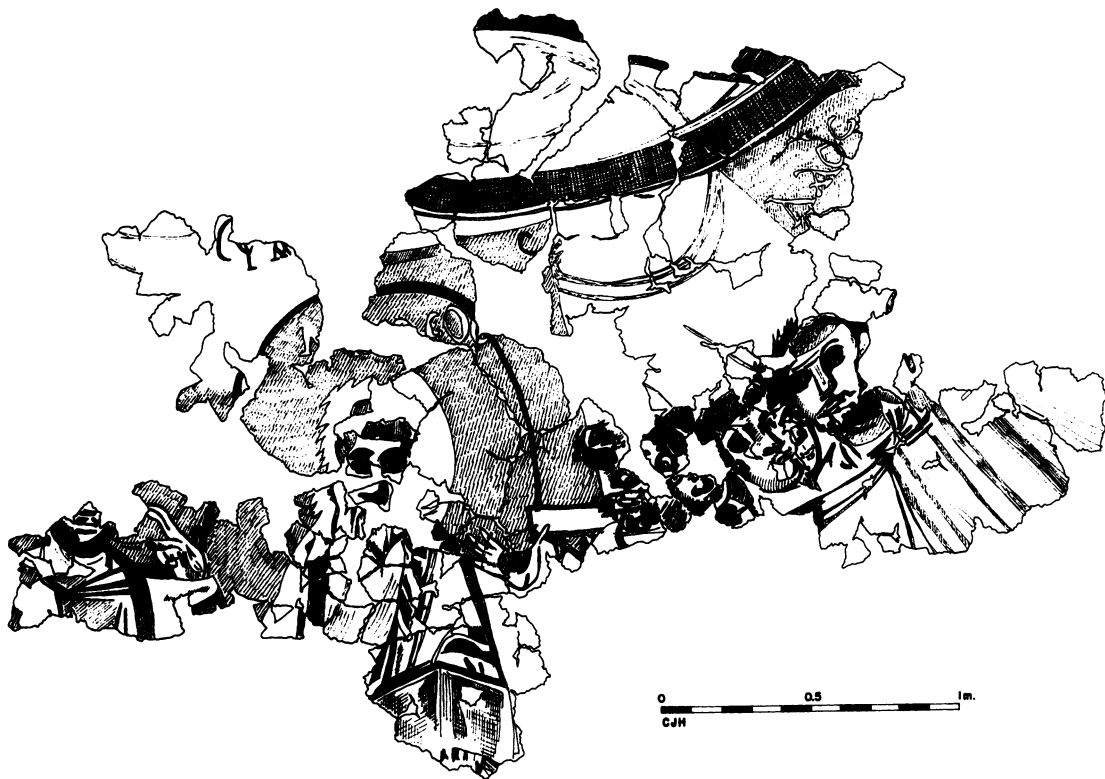
5 Painting of the baptistery's northeast semidome before removal of the second phase painting (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



6 Small head from the second phase painting of the northeast semidome (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



7 Northeast semidome, first phase painting (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



8 Northeast semidome, drawing of the first phase painting

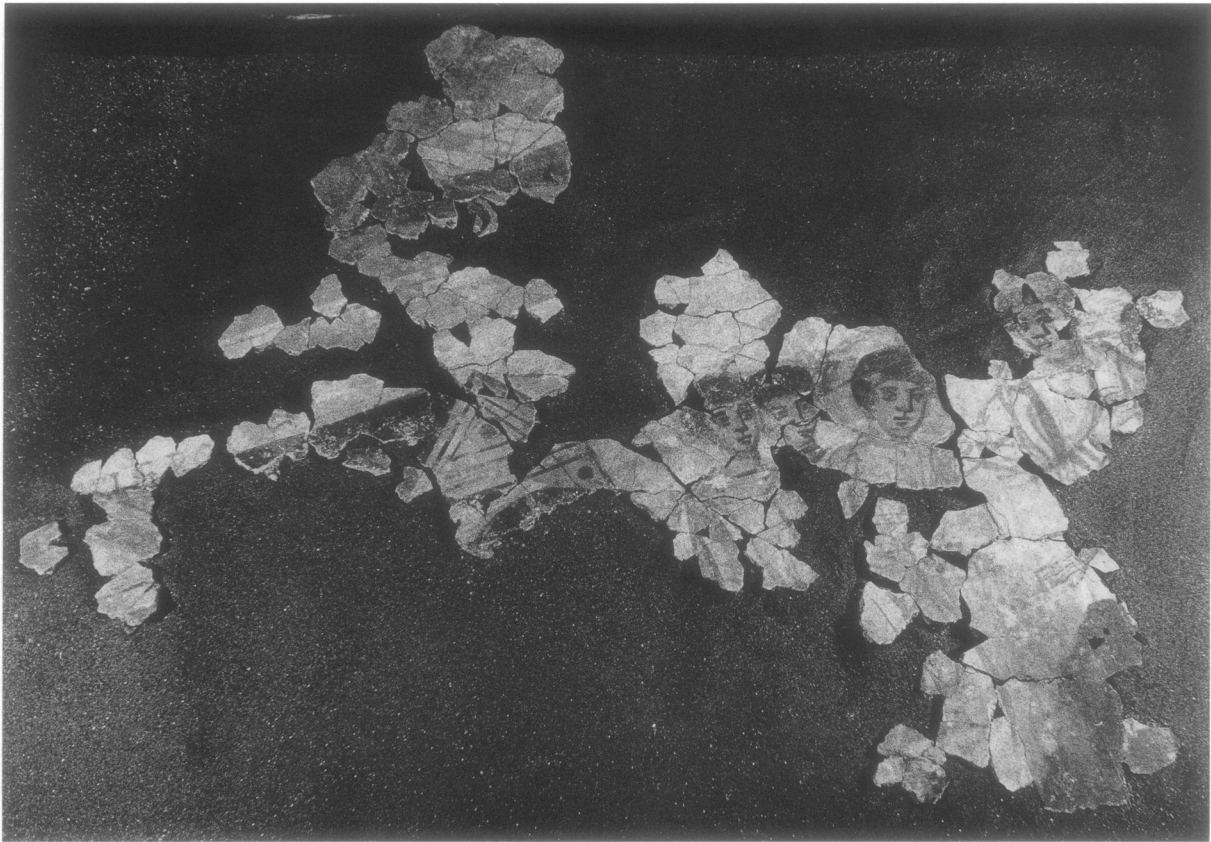


9 Northeast semidome, St. Matthew
(photo: Stobi Excavation Project)

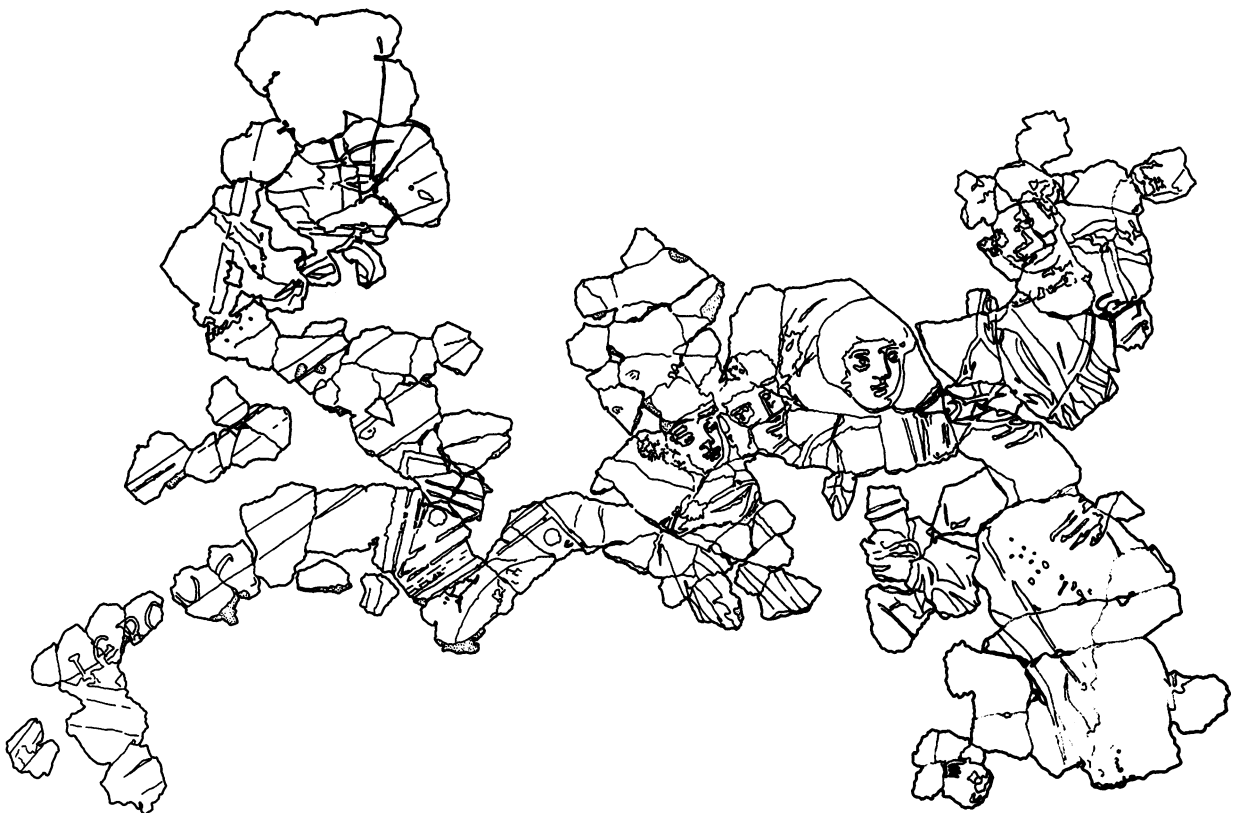


10 Southeast semidome, evangelist
(photo: Stobi Excavation Project)

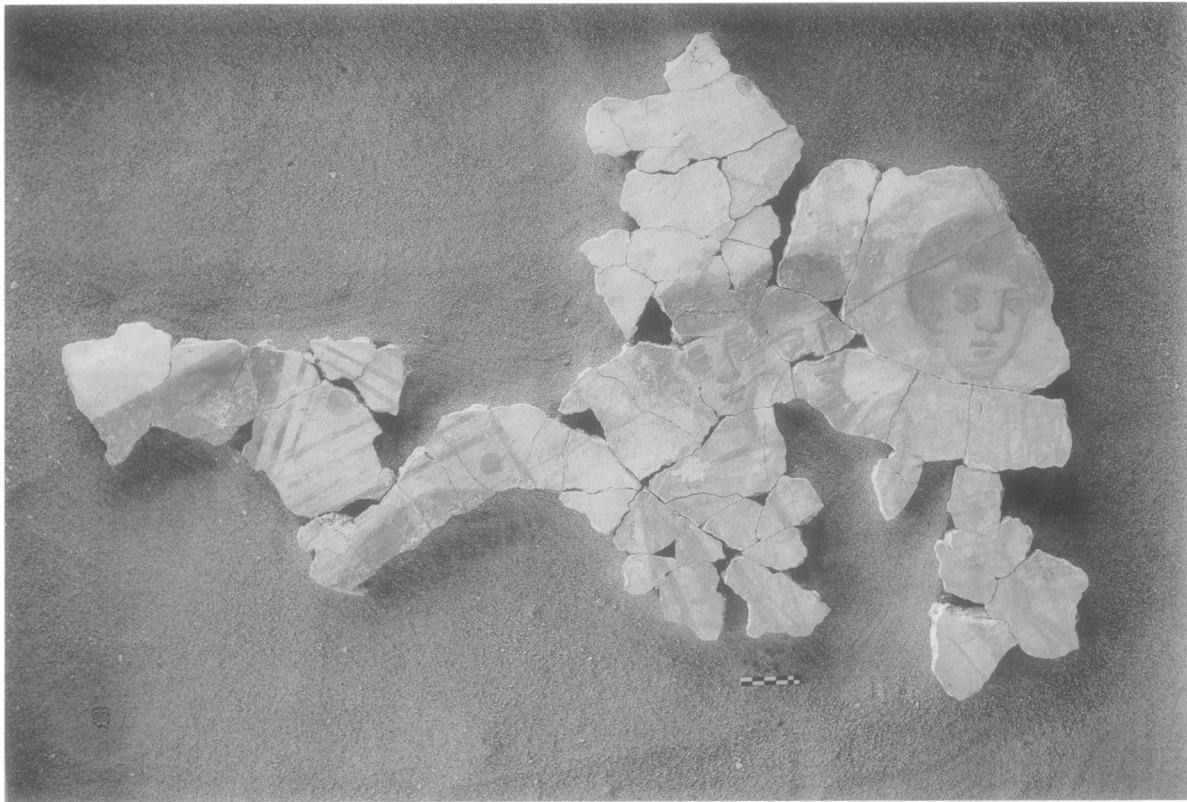
11 Gospel book of St. Augustine, frontispiece to the Gospel of St. Luke (photo: courtesy of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, England)



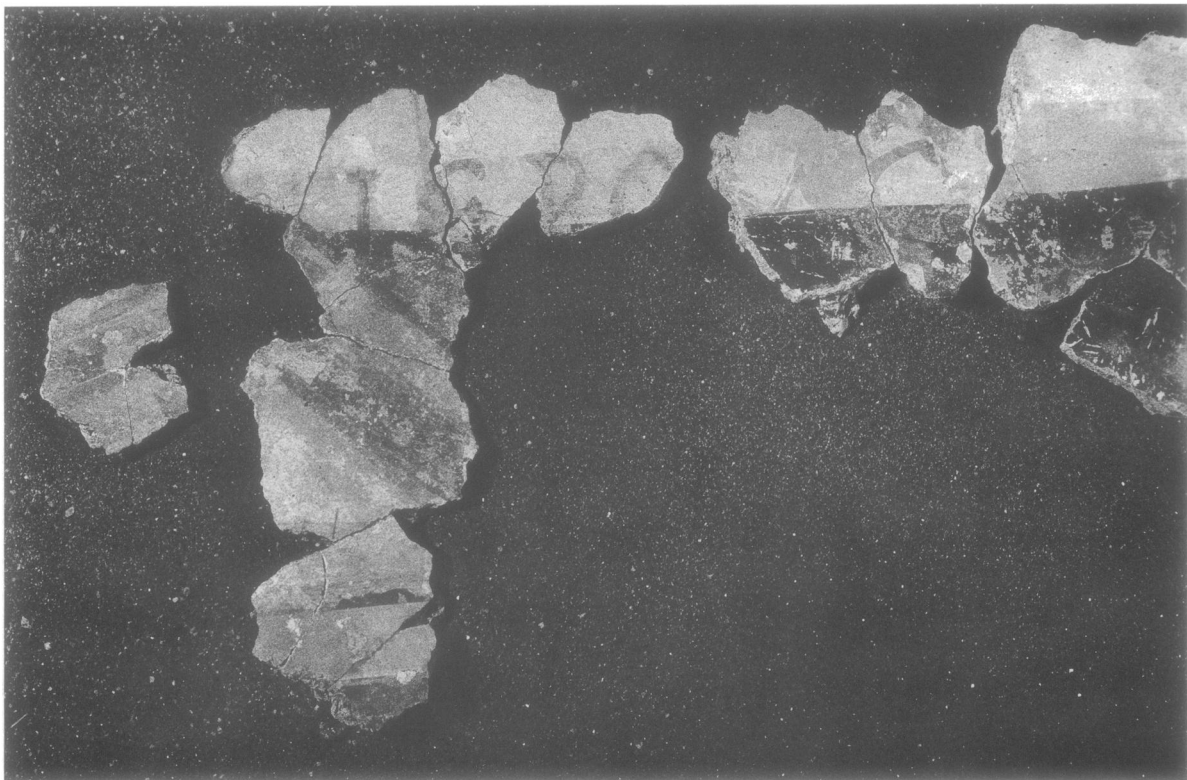
12 East wall painting from the baptistery (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



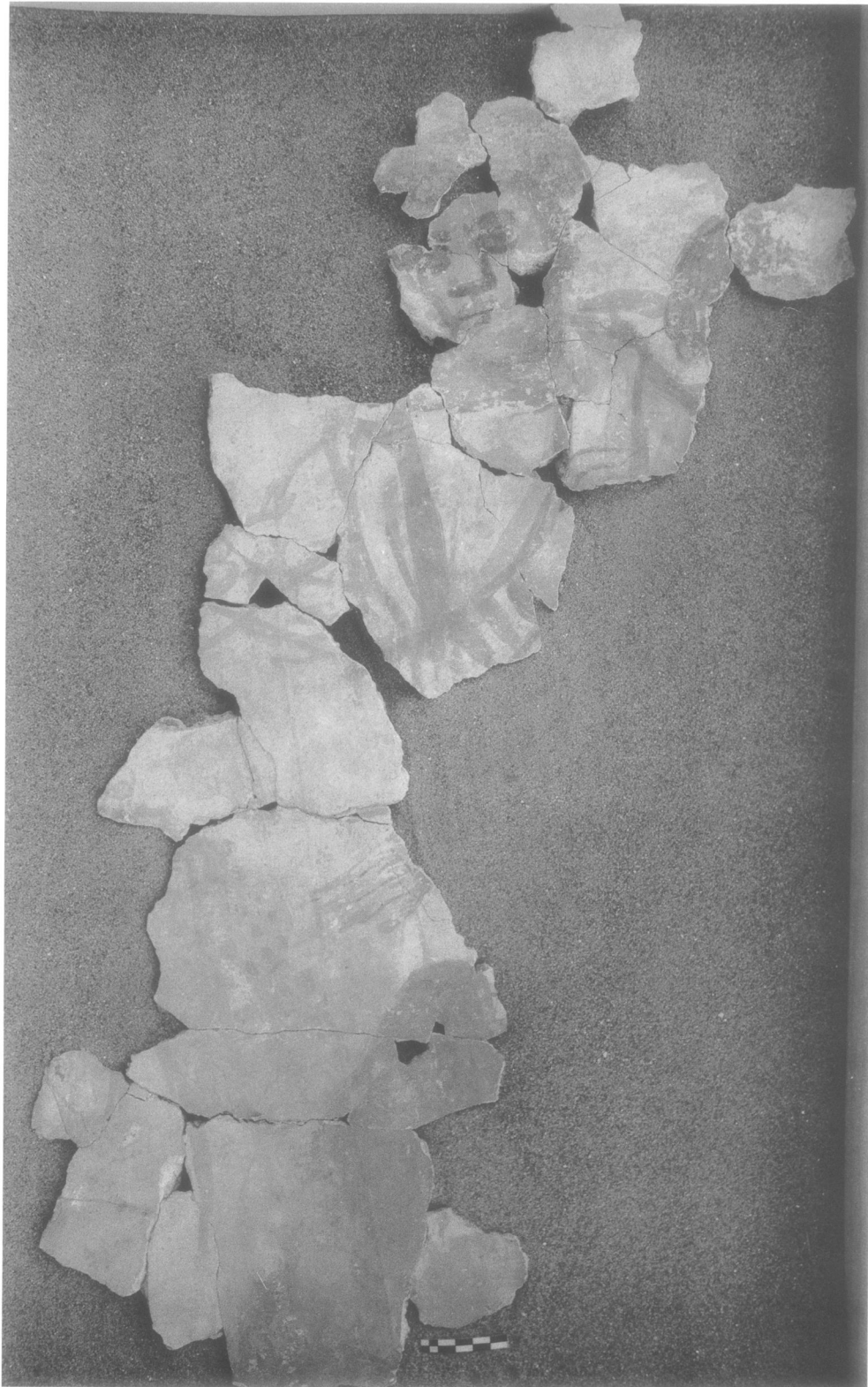
13 Drawing of the east wall painting (width: 1.44 m)



14 Detail of the painting from the east wall: Christ (*far right*), figures, and building (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



15 Detail of the painting from the east wall showing an inscription (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



16 Detail of a bearded figure from the east wall (photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



17 Panel from the ivory throne of Maximian, Museo arcivescovile, Ravenna (reproduced with permission of the museum)



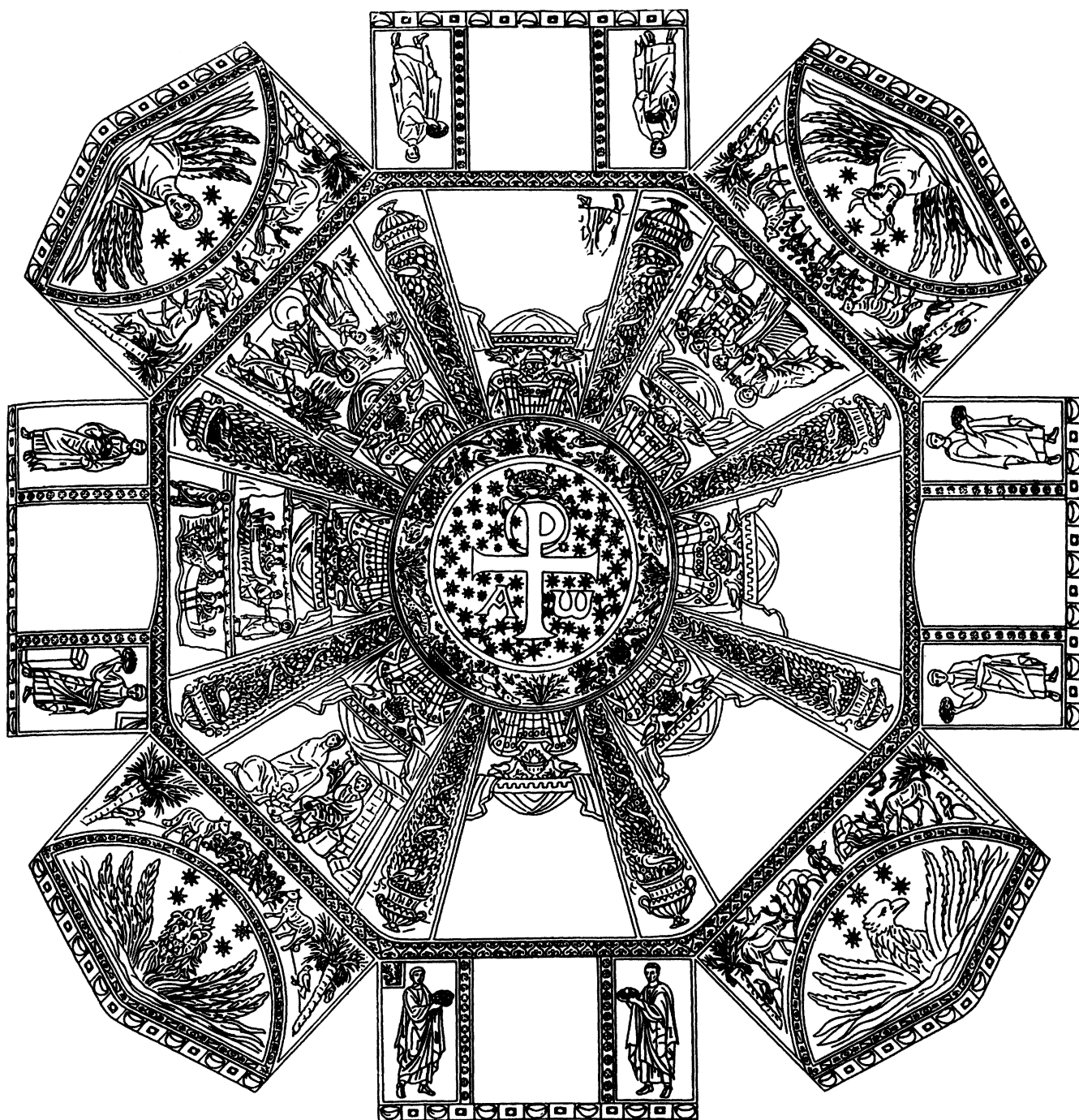
18 Marble relief of the healing of the blind man, Dumbarton Oaks collection



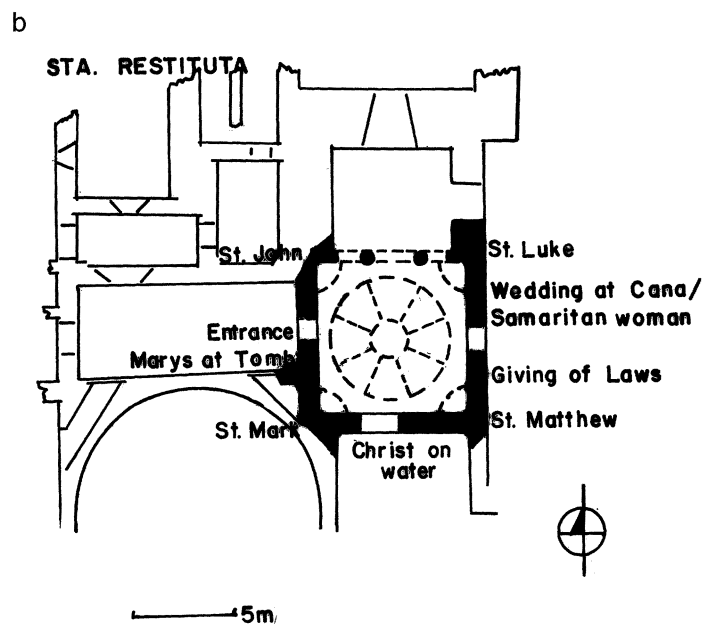
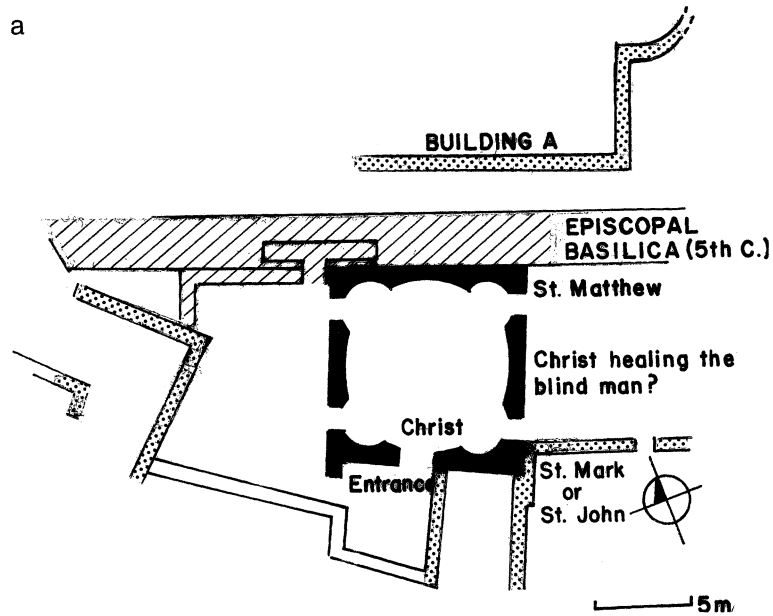
19 Painting of Christ from the baptistery's south wall
(photo: Stobi Excavation Project)



20 Painting of Christ from
the baptistery's west wall
(photo: Stobi Excavation
Project)



21 Naples baptistery, drawing of cupola mosaics (after Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, fig. 1; reproduced with permission of Editions Universitaires, Fribourg)



22 The location of images in the Stobi and Naples baptisteries: (a) Stobi, baptistery of Building A and Episcopal Basilica, ca. 370–380; (b) Naples, baptistery of Sta. Restituta, ca. 400

extends down his right cheek. His nose is broad, and his mouth rather small. Behind the head of this man appears part of the face of a beardless youth who is looking to the right.

The last figure on the right that is preserved to any extent is that of a man with a short brown beard and mustache. Presented in an almost frontal position, his large round eyes appear to engage the viewer. He wears a white cloak fastened at the center. Though more figures were once located to the right, very little remains of these. Above the heads of these figures is what appears to be a swag of hanging drapery, in purple on a pale blue background. To the right is an area of pale purple in which is contained the inscription ΛΑΟC. Above the entire composition, a curving decorative border encloses a segment of a circle, thus completing the design of the semidome at the top.

In scale, the paintings from the northeast semidome are quite large, with heads more than 25–30 cm in height, or over life-size. These contrast in size with the painted figures on the walls between the semidomes, in which the heads are generally around 15 cm in height. The significance of this difference in scale is discussed below. Remains from the other three semidomes have been found, but most are in very poor condition. The face of one other evangelist, however, can be identified with some certainty. Figure 10 shows the face in question; it is painted on a blue ground like that of St. Matthew, and traces of what may have been parts of white letters from an inscription can be seen on the left. Most telling is the size of the head: it would have been (the top of the head is missing) about 25 cm in height. The face is that of a fairly young man, with brown hair and a short brown beard. On iconographical and other grounds, discussed below, I postulate that this painting represents the evangelist Mark.

While the evangelist from the south semidome (Mark?) appears as a youth with dark hair and beard, Matthew appears as a much older man, whose hair and longer beard are streaked with white. Because of the careful distinction in facial features between the paintings of the two surviving evangelists at Stobi, I would argue that they are meant to be portraits. While surviving portraits of the evangelists from this early period are not common, we find a representation of Matthew as a venerable, white-bearded man in the Orthodox Baptistry in Ravenna, of the mid-fifth century A.D.¹¹ At Ravenna, too, Matthew wears a long white mantle, similar to the pale blue chlamys of the Stobi representation. In the Stobi paintings, both clothing and pose, with the saint holding his Gospel book, echo the iconography chosen for Old Testament prophets, such as the prophets in S. Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna. Depictions of the evangelists appear, then, to be consciously related to those of the ancient prophets who predicted the coming of the Messiah.

Considered as a whole, however, including the figures who flank Matthew on either side, the northeast semidome paintings are iconographically related most closely to another genre, that of the philosopher surrounded by his pupils. This genre has ancient roots, dating at least to the Hellenistic period, and is found in all media, including free-standing sculpture.¹² An example from Apamea, in the form of a floor mosaic, shows Socrates seated in the center with three bearded followers seated on each side of him.¹³

¹¹S. Kostof, *The Orthodox Baptistry at Ravenna* (New Haven, Conn., 1965), fig. 51.

¹²A. Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), 72–73.

¹³*Ibid.*, 72, pl. 174.

Socrates is distinguished from his fellow philosophers not only by his central location, but also because his head is considerably higher than those of the other figures. While Socrates himself is bare-chested, at least two of the other philosophers wear the chlamys with the clavus or shoulder stripe.

The popularity of this theme of the philosopher and his pupils increased dramatically in the late antique period, when it was adopted for use in Christian iconography. A painting in the Via Latina Catacomb in Rome, dated to the fourth century, may represent Aristotle giving an anatomy lesson.¹⁴ Here again, the philosopher is given the position of honor, seated at the highest level and, in this case, slightly left of center, but still flanked by three pupils on either side. Here, as so often in the catacomb paintings, subjects that are not specifically Christian in content are used as symbols for Christian worshippers. Not surprisingly, the same iconographical systems were soon explicitly adapted for Christian use: now instead of a pagan philosopher and his pupils, we have Christ himself surrounded by the apostles. Such a scene is found in a wall painting in Verona, on a lunette of the hypogeum of S. Maria in Stelle; the painting probably dates from the fifth century. The Verona Christ is seated in the midst of the apostles wearing robes of imperial purple and, like the Stobi St. Matthew, surrounded by a blue nimbus.¹⁵

Another depiction is found in the apse mosaic of S. Aquilino in Milan of ca. 400 A.D.¹⁶ At S. Aquilino, Christ appears as young and beardless, but his disciples are of varying ages, some appearing youthful, while others have white hair and beards. Christ's pose, with his right hand raised and the left holding a scroll, is the same one chosen for the Stobi depiction of St. Matthew, who raises his right hand in the gesture of address or blessing and in the left holds his Gospel book. In his discussion of the S. Aquilino mosaic, W. Dorigo sees, as may also be the case at Stobi, "an underlying reference to portraiture in the figures of the apostles and in that of Christ."¹⁷

Adoption of such a specific iconographical type must represent a deliberate attempt on the part of Christian artists or patrons to portray Christ as the end result, the ultimate embodiment, of a long and distinguished line of philosophers—the True Philosopher. It is quite possible that this appropriation of imagery was chosen at least in part for its appeal to classically educated pagans. It is also not difficult to see why this image was used for the evangelists as well, in their capacity as teachers of the word of Christ, study of which culminates in the rite of baptism.

What is the significance of the architectural setting in the evangelist scene at Stobi? Certainly the appearance of St. Matthew within an arched opening (an apse?) is meant to emphasize his importance. It is, I believe, borrowed from imperial iconography, where the architecture is used to place the emperor in a position of sole authority, and reflects actual architectural arrangements in the imperial court. An example is the silver misso-

¹⁴A. Ferrua, *Catacombe sconosciute* (Florence, 1990), 121–23, fig. 111.

¹⁵B. Forlati Tamaro, "L'Ipogeo di S. Maria in Stelle, Verona," in *Stucchi e mosaici altomedioevali*, I: *Lo stucco, il mosaico, studi vari* (Milan, 1962), 245–50. Forlati Tamaro dates the transformation of the hypogeum into a Christian chapel as not later than the 5th century. See discussion in W. Dorigo, *Late Roman Painting* (London, 1970), 259–61.

¹⁶C. Bertelli, "I mosaici di Sant'Aquilino," in *La Basilica di San Lorenzo in Milano*, ed. G. A. Dell'Aqua (Milan, 1985), 145–51.

¹⁷Dorigo, *Late Roman Painting*, 227–28.

rium of Theodosius I, created to celebrate his decennalia.¹⁸ Theodosius is seated in the center of the missorium, beneath an arched opening that forms part of an arcuated pediment. His nephew Valentinian II and his son Arcadius flank him, but they are depicted at a smaller scale and are not contained within the arch. The arch is therefore meant to symbolize and reinforce the power of the individual posed within it.¹⁹ The significance of this iconographical system lies partly in relation to its reflection of actual court ritual, the appearance of the emperor, seated upon his throne in his apsed and arcuated audience hall. Just such an audience hall is still preserved in Diocletian's Palace at Split. It seems, then, that the arched opening painted behind St. Matthew at Stobi could also be read as an apse.

While imperial attributes are appropriate for Christ, as emperor of heaven, they are also commonly assigned not only to other holy figures such as the evangelists, but also to Christ's representatives in the church, the bishops. R. Krautheimer compares the ceremonial entry of the emperor, and his throne beneath the arch of his audience hall, to that of the bishop into the apse area of the church, which was contained beneath a "trumphal arch."²⁰

Some scholars, too, would regard the gesture of the Stobi St. Matthew as an example of *adlocutio*, another appropriation of imperial iconography. Numerous examples of imperial uses of this gesture survive from antiquity, the most famous being the statue of

¹⁸Theodosius' decennalia was celebrated in the same year in which he visited Stobi; he stayed long enough to issue three edicts (*CTh* 16.4.2, 16.5.15). S. MacCormack, in *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley, Calif., 1981), 220, relates the imagery of the missorium of Theodosius both to imperial ceremonies, such as the adventus of the emperor, and to panegyrics composed in honor of these ceremonial occasions.

The influence of imperial iconography on images of Christ has recently been challenged by T. F. Mathews in *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Christian Art* (Princeton, N.J., 1993). Mathews goes to great lengths to deny such influences, but many scholars, in reviewing his work, seem to have come to a consensus that, while the book provides a necessary corrective to the "emperor mystique," in fact Mathews overstates his case. P. Brown, for example, in his review in *ArtB* 77 (1995), 500, writes that "Mathews claims to be able either to banish imperial themes entirely from the explanation of many scenes, or to see them turned on their head in a Christian context. The reader is faced, at every turn, with a peremptory either/or. Either representations of Christ betray artistic conventions that must mirror faithfully the visual content of contemporary court ceremonials and imperial representations—and, further, must communicate the overbearing message associated with such ceremonials and representations—or they communicate, often, the exact opposite." Brown goes on to demonstrate that Mathews must ignore some iconographic images in order to present his argument; for example, Mathews states that high-backed thrones are only for images of gods (and are therefore appropriate for Christ), and so he does not discuss the medallions of Constantine that show the emperor on a high-backed throne. Images in art, then, cannot be made completely consistent with Mathews' reinterpretation; and neither, for that matter, can the words of Early Christian writers that refer to Christ as king, ruler, and military leader. Mathews' book may be a necessary corrective of a viewpoint that is overly reliant upon recognizing imperial imagery in Christian art, but, in my opinion, it is not successful in completely denying the existence of such imagery.

¹⁹A. Wallace-Hadrill discusses the appropriation of the apsidal room from the public sphere to domestic architecture, where it is meant to demonstrate the public nature of certain functions of the Roman house. See "The Social Structure of the Roman House," *BSA* 56 (1988), 43–97. He writes: "The apse with its semicupola serves to frame the visual centrepiece of certain types of public room, notably the basin ('labrum') recess of the caldarium in public baths, the cult-image recess in certain temples, and the tribunal of a basilica. The same feature appears in certain grand imperial reception rooms from the early empire onwards (the so-called Auditorium Maecenatis, the Aula Isiaca, the auditorium of Domitian's Palace) and in rare instances in grand reception rooms in private houses" (p. 68).

²⁰Krautheimer, *Early Christian and Byzantine Architecture*, 40.

Augustus from Prima Porta. On the other hand, the gesture is also commonly used by philosophers addressing their students, and it may well be from this source that it was appropriated for use in images of Christ himself, as the True Philosopher, as noted above in the mosaic of S. Aquilino.

A distinctive and unusual feature of the Stobi baptistery depiction of the evangelist Matthew is the men who flank him and who are identified by the word ΛΑΟC. The meaning of this inscription is probably to be taken as "congregation" or "Christian community." This usage was derived from Jewish tradition, where it was used to identify the Jewish community and, in a larger sense, the chosen people of Israel.²¹ An inscription in a fifth-century synagogue in Hulda, Israel, reads *eulogeitos ho laos*, or "blessed be the people."²² Used commonly in the literature of the early church, the word is no longer associated with the Jewish people, but is used in a narrow sense to refer to the "congregation assembled for worship" (as distinct from the leaders).²³ The modern term "laity" is derived from this effort to distinguish between the leaders and the congregation. It is clear in the Stobi painting that Matthew is meant to be seen as distinct from his followers, since he is set apart from them within his arch.

Closest in style to the representation of St. Matthew at Stobi are the depictions of evangelists in painted miniatures from manuscripts. In the Rabbula Codex, created in Zagba, Mesopotamia, in 586, the evangelist Matthew appears in an arch supported by columns.²⁴ The saint's appearance and attributes are similar to the Stobi St. Matthew; he is represented as white-haired and with a white beard, is raising his right hand with the same gesture, and with his left hand holds his Gospel book. Also comparable is the saint's clothing, pale in color but with a darker shoulder stripe.

Miniatures of the evangelists served as frontispieces to the Gospels in a late-sixth-century manuscript of the Gospels of St. Augustine, now in Cambridge, England.²⁵ Only one of the miniatures survives, that of St. Luke (Fig. 11). Iconographically, it too is very close to the Stobi painting. An architectural setting dominates, with Luke seated beneath a lintel, above which an arch opens, containing the tetramorph symbol of Luke on a blue background. Luke himself is seated upon a throne with two Corinthian columns on each side. The space behind Luke is recessed, but the recess appears to be rectilinear rather than apsidal. The space is depicted in gold and seems to form a substitute for a nimbus. Luke is seated, again white-haired and bearded, and holds his Gospel book with his left hand, while his right hand appears to be supporting his chin. On each side of the evangelist, between the two columns, are painted tiny scenes from the life of Christ, six on each side, in registers one above the other. As discussed below, this same system of larger images of evangelists flanked by smaller scenes, one above the other, is also found in the Stobi baptistery. Before I discuss that system, however, I must describe the remains of these smaller-scale paintings at Stobi.

²¹This definition of *laos* is discussed in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. and ed. G. W. Bromley, IV (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1967), 29–57.

²²G. M. A. Hanfmann, "The Ninth Campaign at Sardis," *BASOR* 187 (1967), 10. The inscription is painted in purple letters and surrounded by faint traces of architectural motifs.

²³*Theological Dictionary*, ed. Kittel, 57.

²⁴K. Weitzmann, *Late Antique and Early Christian Book Illumination* (New York, 1977), 100, pl. 35.

²⁵F. Wormald, *The Miniatures in the Gospel of St. Augustine, Corpus Christi College Ms. 286* (Cambridge, 1954), 1–4, fig. VII.

Best preserved of all the smaller-scale paintings that adorned the walls between the semidomes is a large area about 1.5 m square from the east wall (Figs. 12–16). There appear to be parts of two scenes here, separated by a decorative border. Of the upper scene, only the lowest parts are preserved, and no identification of the subject matter is possible. At the left, the area is painted in mottled green, with white stripes, and on the right is an area of white with thin painted lines in red. These may represent the lower parts of draped figures. Underneath this scene is a border consisting of a band of light brown with a narrow reddish stripe in the center, then a white band, and finally a pink band with an overpainted bead-and-reel design.

Below the border is a figural composition. Its background is formed of wide bands of alternating white and blue, representing the sky. At the left is a building with a dark red roof. On the top of the roof, and partly overlapping it, is part of a Greek inscription (Fig. 15). Preserved letters are I E P O [. . .] YC [. . .]. Part of the building's facade is preserved on the right, consisting of almost the entire pediment above the top of an arch. Architectural moldings are indicated with dark red lines on a background of white. Centered within the pediment is an insignium, and tondi are located on each side of the arch. Little is preserved of the building below this; the area within the arch is painted dark red.

On the right of the building are five figures, of which the lowest parts are missing. In the center stands Christ, identified by a nimbus of yellow ocher. He leans forward to the right and wears a white cloak, with folds painted in red, and with red stripes on either side falling from the shoulder. Reddish-brown hair surrounds his face in a caplike arc. The youthful, beardless face is presented almost frontally, with only a slight turn toward the left. The face is pink, with eyes, nose, and mouth contoured in pinkish-brown and with darker shades accentuating the eyeballs, eyelids, tip of the nose, and lips. His eyes are oversized and very round. To the left of Christ is a head with deep blue-black curly hair, shorter than that of Christ, and with a narrow face and features. This head also turns slightly to the left. To the left of this figure, closest to the building, is a young man, again depicted almost frontally, wearing a pale orange cloak fastened by a fibula in thick white paint that is raised considerably above the surface of the rest of the painting. Folds of his cloak are painted in orange-brown. His hair, once full at the sides, is partly worn away. It does not form a concave arc around his face as does Christ's hair, but instead dips down in a convex arc toward the eyes.

On Christ's right is the figure of a broad-shouldered, bearded man whose face turns toward Christ and who gestures toward him (Fig. 16). A partly preserved hand may belong to this figure, or to another figure to the right, of which now only the hair and a part of the forehead are preserved. The face of the bearded man is represented in a three-quarter view. His reddish-brown hair is worn away in places. His forehead is brownish-pink, and the rest pink with dark brown contours. His clothing is brown with reddish-brown stripes running down from the shoulders, similar to the clothing of the figure at the far left. Below the hand is a large area of rich reddish-brown, which may represent the drapery of a crouched or seated figure. An area of green speckled with brown spots is located to the left.

No exact parallel to the east wall scene at Stobi exists. Nevertheless, study of the evidence contained within the scene leads to a strong likelihood that the scene represents a

healing miracle performed by Christ. An important factor in terms of identification is the inscription, which is unfortunately incomplete. Preserved are the letters I E P O [. . .] YC [. . .]. These may represent part of the city name IEPOYC [AAHM].²⁶ Another possible reading is IEPO [N] [. . .] YC [. . .]. In this reading, the building itself is identified as IEPON, or temple, and the remaining letters, [. . .] YC [. . .], form part of the name Jerusalem. Given the space available, and the probable proportions of the building represented, the former interpretation seems most likely. In either case, the inscription provides strong evidence that the location of this scene is the temple at Jerusalem, which certainly narrows the possibilities considerably. The building itself is perfectly suitable as a temple type: a close parallel, in fact, is a representation of the temple at Jerusalem from the third-century synagogue at Dura Europos, where the temple appears as a pedimented building with a round floral design in its gable.²⁷

A feature of the method of representation of the building is that the whole facade is shown, as well as the entire long side of the building. This method of representation is very common in the period, as evidenced by a fourth–fifth-century mosaic from Tunisia, now in the Musée Alaoui.²⁸ This mosaic represents the mother church, identified by the Latin inscription “Ecclesia Mater” above the building. In his desire to delineate clearly each part of the church, the mosaicist has separated the various parts of the structure: the apse with a round window, an arch, the side view of the structure, and the facade, with two small round windows flanking a rectangular one. Similar depictions of buildings can be seen on the panels of glass opus sectile found in the sea at Kenchreai, the eastern port of Corinth.²⁹ In these panels, dated to the third quarter of the fourth century, the buildings often show one end in full frontal view as well as an entire long side. In addition, several of the buildings display insignia like that in the Stobi painting. As well as scenes with buildings, a number of the panels found at Kenchreai also contained portraits of philosophers and of religious figures.

Assuming the locale as the temple at Jerusalem, what event in the life of Christ could be represented here? The presentation at the temple is a possibility, but here the figure of Christ, while appearing very youthful, is not childlike, nor is he significantly smaller than the bearded figure on the right.³⁰ Furthermore, the other two portraits of Christ from the Stobi baptistery also show a very youthful Christ, and since there is only one event from the childhood of Christ described in the Gospels, these other portraits must represent the adult Christ.

Based on the scene as a whole, what is most likely represented here is a healing miracle, probably the healing of the blind. In the Gospel of St. Matthew, Christ is described

²⁶S.v. Ἱεροσόλυμα in W. Arndt and F. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, 1957). Two variants given for the name of the city are Ἱεροσόλυμα and Ἱεροουσαλήμ.

²⁷K. Weitzmann and H. L. Kessler, *The Frescoes of the Dura Synagogue and Christian Art*, DOS 28 (Washington, D.C., 1990), 98, figs. 5, 139. See also J. Lassus, *The Early Christian and Byzantine World* (Toronto, 1967), 17, fig. 3.2.

²⁸N. Duval, “La représentation du palais dans l’art du bas-empire et du haut moyen âge d’après le psautier d’Utrecht,” *CahArch* 15 (1965), 207–54.

²⁹L. Ibrahim, R. Scranton, and R. Brill, *Kenchreai: Eastern Port of Corinth, II: The Panels of Opus Sectile in Glass* (Leiden, 1976), pls. 89–99.

³⁰C. Hemans, “The Fresco Program of the Episcopal Basilica at Stobi,” *BSCAbstr* 8 (1982), 15–16.

as performing miracles, including healing miracles, within the temple precinct at Jerusalem (Matt. 21:14). A number of contemporary depictions of similar scenes survive, and they include a bearded figure who serves as “witness” to the miracle. An example is the ivory panel from the throne of Maximian at Ravenna (Fig. 17), where Christ is shown in the process of healing two figures, a blind man and a lame man. Christ stands on the right, with his head inclined toward the stooping blind man. Behind the two supplicants stands a bearded figure who raises his right hand and in his left holds a book.³¹ In some representations, the bearded witness can be clearly identified as a prophet who functions as a witness to the fulfillment of Messianic prophecy; in the ivory panel, however, the figure holds a book, not the scroll usually held by a prophet.³² On an ivory box in the Vatican Museum is a scene showing Christ healing the blind, with another “witness” figure who once again holds a book. The entire scene, interestingly, takes place beneath an arcuated pediment that recalls similar scenes on sarcophagi.³³

By far the closest parallel for the Stobi composition is a small marble relief at Dumbarton Oaks, studied by E. Kitzinger (Fig. 18).³⁴ Kitzinger dates the relief to the reign of Theodosius I and believes it originated in an imperial workshop in Constantinople. The relief, incomplete on all sides except the bottom, measures 26.5 cm in height and 28.7 cm in width. On the relief, Christ occupies the center, where he stands leaning slightly to the left, while he reaches out to the left to touch the eye of a stooping blind man. Christ appears youthful and beardless, with hair arranged in a caplike form around his head. He is the only figure in the relief to bear a nimbus. Dressed in a tunic and pallium, he holds a volumen in his left hand. To Christ’s right is the upper part of a man’s head. On the far right stands a bearded figure, dressed in the same clothing as Christ, who carries a tall staff topped by a cross.

Similarities between the Dumbarton Oaks relief and the Stobi painting are remark-

³¹C. Cecchelli, *La cattedra di Massimiano ed altri avorii romano-orientali* (Rome, 1937), pl. 32.

³²In the Gospels of Rossano and Sinope, Old Testament prophets are certainly depicted. They carry scrolls inscribed with quotations from their writings: A. Munoz, *Il codice purpureo di Rossano* (Rome, 1907), pl. xi; A. Grabar, *Les peintures de l'évangéliste de Sinope* (Paris, 1948), pl. iv.

³³Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 97, pl. 246. See, for example, the architectural framework on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus: F. Gerke, *Der Sarkophag des Iunius Bassus* (Berlin, 1936).

³⁴E. Kitzinger, “A Marble Relief of the Theodosian Period,” *DOP* 14 (1961), 19–42. The relief was declared a forgery in 1981 by S. Boyd and G. Vikan, *Questions of Authenticity among the Arts of Byzantium: Catalog of an Exhibition Held at Dumbarton Oaks, January 7–May 11, 1981* (Washington, D.C., 1981), 4–7. The relief did not come from an established context, such as a documented archaeological excavation, and that is one reason that its authenticity could be so easily questioned. Kitzinger rebuts the declaration of Boyd and Vikan in a footnote to the new German edition of *Byzantine Art in the Making*, citing the relief’s “style and quality and iconographic peculiarities” (*Byzantinische Kunst im Werden: Stilentwicklungen in der Mittelmeerkunst vom 3. bis zum 7. Jahrhundert* [Cologne, 1984], 78, 79, 256 n. 43). The burden of proof still appears to remain with Boyd and Vikan. Furthermore, the Stobi baptistery’s east wall painting adds an unquestionably authentic stylistic and iconographic parallel that lends support to Kitzinger’s original attribution. For example, one design element that Boyd and Vikan found particularly indicative of a forgery is the bead-and-reel design on the bottom of the relief. They felt that it had been slavishly copied from the diadem adorning a marble head of Arcadius that was found shortly before the “forged relief” came to light. But the presence of the same bead-and-reel motif in the Stobi baptistery east wall, in a scene that most likely represents the same theme, adds important new evidence in support of Kitzinger’s attribution. See also G. Vikan, *Catalogue of the Sculpture in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection from the Ptolemaic Period to the Renaissance* (Washington, D.C., 1995), xi–xii, wherein Vikan explains his exclusion of the relief from the catalogue but requests “any information or argumentation that may yet exonerate it.”

able, despite the difference in media. Both exhibit the characteristics of Theodosian art, documented by J. Kollwitz in his detailed study of Theodosian sculpture.³⁵ Typical is the slight angle or incline of figures, as seen in both depictions of Christ, and the representation of Christ as a wide-eyed, almost innocent-looking young man, with his hair forming a round cap framing the face. The same feature characterizes a portrait of Arcadius in Istanbul. A soft "classicizing" cast can also be identified in both, in the drapery and in the facial features. In the Stobi painting, little or nothing of the blind man is preserved; he must have been located between Christ and the bearded figure to his right.

A notable difference between the two works is the appearance of the bearded figure. In the Stobi painting the man has a caplike hairstyle like that of Christ, while the Dumbarton Oaks relief depicts a balding man with a domed forehead. Kitzinger identifies this figure as St. Paul and suggests that Paul is used as a Constantinopolitan counterpart of St. Peter, whose fame was growing so great as to threaten the preeminence of Byzantium.³⁶ As Kitzinger expresses it, "a comprehensive explanation is needed of all the phenomena indicating a particular preference for Paul in East Roman art of the period of Theodosius I."³⁷ Further, if the Dumbarton Oaks relief is indeed from a baptistery table, as Kitzinger believes, then the presence of Paul is even more striking, for Paul recovered his sight when he was baptized. In more general terms, also, the miracle of the healing of the blind is commonly associated with baptism; evidence for this comes both from liturgical sources and from remains of decorated baptisteries.³⁸ As discussed below, other healing miracles, too, are commonly found in programs of baptistery decoration.

Who is the bearded figure in the Stobi painting? It seems unlikely to be Paul, because the hairstyle does not look like his. He holds neither scroll nor Gospel book, and so cannot be definitely identified as either a prophet or an evangelist. While it is certainly unsatisfying to leave him an anonymous "witness" figure, no further identification is possible at present.

Another inscription survives from the east wall of the baptistery, the single word ΦΗΜΙ. It cannot be determined whether it comes from the healing miracle scene or from the scene above. Its presence is significant because it must introduce a quotation from Christ, and therefore it is clear that scriptural passages formed part of the Stobi baptistery decoration, even if the precise passage cannot be determined. The word does occur in the Gospel of Matthew just after the scene of the healing miracles within the temple precinct, when Jesus causes the fig tree to wither (Matt. 21:18–22). However, this is such a common word throughout the New Testament that it is not possible to make a specific identification.

From the remaining fragments of the painted walls of the baptistery, only smaller sections have been reconstructed. From the southwest semidome a group of four faces, very badly preserved, probably represents the *laos* surrounding another evangelist. Four more poorly preserved faces, from the northwest semidome, are likely to represent the same scheme. Most striking of the remaining fragments are two heads of Christ, one

³⁵J. Kollwitz, *Oströmische Plastik der theodosianischen Zeit* (Berlin, 1941). See also B. Küllerich, *Late Fourth Century Classicism in the Plastic Arts: Studies in the So-Called Theodosian Renaissance* (Odense, 1993), 133–34.

³⁶Kitzinger, "Marble Relief," 35, 36.

³⁷Ibid., 35.

³⁸Ibid., 35, 36.

from the south wall (Fig. 19) and one from the west wall (Fig. 20). They are identified as Christ because they have a golden nimbus, like the Christ from the east wall. The head from the south wall, about 15 cm in height, is similar in appearance to that on the east wall and may be by the same artist. That from the west wall is quite different in style, with smaller facial features and fewer brush strokes used in its execution. The painting is in poor condition: not only has a great deal of paint flaked off, but it has also been splashed with large drips of white paint, presumably during the “whitewashing” of the building’s final decorative phase.

I now consider the entire iconographic program of the Stobi baptistery paintings. It seems safe to assume that each of the four semidomes contained a depiction of an evangelist, of which two are extant, Matthew and one other, possibly Mark. On the walls between the semidomes, at a smaller scale, scenes from the life of Christ were presented, in at least two registers. One of these smaller-scale scenes, that from the east wall, probably shows Christ performing a healing miracle. Do these images, and their locations on the baptistery walls, fall into any previously known pattern of baptistery decoration?

Few baptisteries survive from this early period, and even fewer have much of their interior decoration preserved. The Naples baptistery, belonging to the church of S. Restituta, is dated to around 400 (Fig. 21).³⁹ While some of the mosaics adorning this small building are missing, enough remain to provide a good deal of information on the kind of images deemed appropriate for this important ritual setting. Like the Stobi baptistery, the building is square, but forms four apsidioles where the walls create an octagonal transition to its dome. In each of the apsidioles is represented one of the tetramorphs, or winged symbols of the evangelists. In the southeast is that of Matthew, in the southwest Mark, in the northeast Luke, and in the northwest John, corresponding to the order in which they are described in Ezekiel. At first glance this does not seem to correspond exactly with the placement of the figures in the Stobi baptistery, where St. Matthew occupies the northeast semidome. If one examines the evidence a little more closely, however, it appears that an exact correspondence might once have existed. The original entrance to the Naples baptistery, according to J. L. Maier and others, was on the west. Thus, as one entered the building, the evangelist in the far right corner would have been Matthew. At Stobi, the main entrance was on the south. The south entrance is wider than the others and was reached by the ambulatory on the west. When one entered the Stobi baptistery from the south, the evangelist in the far right corner would once again be Matthew, as at Naples. (Figure 22 diagrams the locations of the images in each baptistery.) Assuming that the placement of the other evangelist figures at Stobi would have followed the pattern at Naples, then in the southeast semidome should be Mark, in the southwest Luke, and in the northwest John.

As discussed above, the painting of the evangelist preserved from the southeast semidome had already been tentatively identified as Mark. This evidence from the Naples baptistery should serve to make the identification much more secure. Mark is usually represented as middle-aged, with dark hair and beard.⁴⁰ He appears thus in the *cubicolo*

³⁹J. L. Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples et ses mosaïques* (Fribourg, 1964).

⁴⁰See A. M. Friend Jr., “The Portraits of the Evangelists in Greek and Latin Manuscripts,” *Art Studies* 5 (1927) 115–47. Friend (p. 120) observes that Mark and Luke are commonly illustrated in manuscripts with

of S. Cecilia in the catacombs of SS. Marcus and Marcellianus in Rome, where he and Matthew are bearded, and Luke and John beardless.⁴¹ In the Rabbula Gospel, where Matthew is shown with white hair and beard, Mark has a short dark beard, while Luke has a full dark beard and John is beardless. In the Rossano Gospel, too, Mark wears a short dark beard and has dark hair; in general, his appearance closely resembles that of the Stobi portrait.⁴² Iconographically, then, the portrait is closest to representations of St. Mark.

No other surviving baptistery contains portraits of the evangelists. In the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna, however, the mosaics of ca. 450 depict four evangeliaries.⁴³ Located on the main directional axes, the Gospel of Luke is on the north, Matthew on the east, John on the south, and Mark on the west. These evangeliaries, therefore, do not follow the order of their mention in Ezekiel. Since in this case we have depictions of the books, and not the evangelists themselves, adhering to this order may not have seemed necessary.

One possibility should be considered in terms of the placement of the images of the evangelists in the baptistery: were the images related not only to the baptistery itself, but also to the main church? Given the great diversity in placement of baptisteries in relation to their churches, this was never a great likelihood in general, and in this case there does not seem to be any such relationship. As seen in the plan (Fig. 2), the baptistery of the Early Church and subsequently of the Episcopal Basilica at Stobi was located in the middle of the south side of the church. At Naples, the baptistery was located at the end of the right aisle of S. Restituta. Given this variation, one would not expect the layout of the iconographic program to be related directionally to the main church, and indeed it does not seem to be. At Stobi, Matthew is positioned closest to the apse, and at Naples, John.

An important fact has been determined: the iconographic program of a baptistery was considered as a discrete entity. From the study of three baptisteries that are close in date, it appears that even in the late fourth century artists were working with a set program of baptistery decoration. In fact, the exact correspondence in position of the evangelist portraits at Stobi and at Naples seems to confirm L. de Bruyne's conclusion that there was a precise parallelism in decoration among early baptisteries. De Bruyne reached this conclusion after comparing the decoration of the Naples baptistery and that

dark hair and shorter beards to distinguish them from the apostles as belonging to a "second generation of Christian witnesses." Friend sees these images as types, not actual portraits, whose inspiration came from Hellenistic works in which portraits of authors were placed at the beginning of texts (p. 118).

⁴¹ G. Kaftal, *Iconography of the Saints in Central and South Italian Painting* (Florence, 1965), 743–48.

⁴² Weitzmann, *Book Illumination*, 96, pl. 33.

⁴³ Kostof, *Orthodox Baptistery*. In the chapel of St. John the Evangelist, adjacent to the Lateran Baptistery in Rome, the four evangelists were depicted in 5th-century mosaics that are now lost. Drawings by Ciampini show that the mosaics depicted the evangelists with their Gospel books. Above their heads their names were inscribed, and above the inscriptions were their symbols. In this chapel, the evangelist mosaics were located beneath actual arches, two evangelists beneath each arch. See R. Garrucci, *Storia della arte cristiana nei primi otto secoli della chiesa*, 6 vols. (Prato, 1872–81), IV, 86–87, pls. 272–73. Other depictions of the evangelists within semidomes are found in a chapel of S. Maria Mater Domini, in Vicenza, of the mid-5th century. See G. P. Bognetti, B. Forlati Tamaro, and G. Lorenzon, *Vicenza nell'alto medioevo* (Venice, 1959), 28ff.

of the third-century baptistery in Dura Europos, Syria.⁴⁴ At Dura, *only* the baptistery of the house church was decorated. It may be, then, that baptistery iconography developed earliest of all and for this reason was thereafter conceived separately from the decoration of the rest of the church. Maier, too, in his study of the Naples baptistery, observes a similarity in subject matter in early baptisteries.⁴⁵ Now the baptistery of the Episcopal Basilica at Stobi can be added to the comparative material. Table 1 presents a schematized summary of the iconographic parallels from the four buildings discussed.

TABLE 1
COMPARISON OF ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAMS OF BAPTISTERIES
AT DURA EUROPOS, NAPLES, RAVENNA (ORTHODOX), AND STOB¹⁴⁶

Dura Europos	Naples	Ravenna (Orthodox)	Stobi
Starry sky	Starry sky		
Good Shepherd	Good Shepherd	Good Shepherd	
Samaritan at well	Jesus and Samaritan		
Walking on water	Walking on water		
Women at tomb	Women at tomb		
	Tetramorphs	Evangelaries	Evangelists
Healing miracle (paralytic)	Healing miracles?		Healing miracle?
	Apostles	Apostles	
	<i>Traditio Legis</i>	<i>Traditio Legis</i>	
Garden of Paradise (?)	Four rivers of paradise		

Scenes found at both Dura and Naples are the women at the tomb, Christ walking on the water, the Samaritan woman at the well, and the Good Shepherd. On the north wall at Dura, now mostly destroyed, were the scenes of walking on the water and the healing of the paralytic. It is likely that the rest of the wall contained more healing miracles. At Naples, some of the mosaic panels in the dome are missing, and Maier and others consider that representations of healing miracles were most likely there, also. Maier proposes these scenes: the paralytic (as at Dura), the blind man, and the deaf mute.⁴⁷ Scholars also agree that a baptism of Christ was likely. At Dura, Old Testament scenes were also present: Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, and a scene of Paradise.⁴⁸

In the vault of the baldacchino over the baptismal pool at Dura, the decoration took the form of stars against a dark blue ground. This scheme, though not found in the baptistery itself, recalls the ceiling painting of the Early Church at Stobi, for which the baptistery was originally built.⁴⁹

⁴⁴L. de Bruyne, "La décoration des baptistères paléochrétiens," in *Miscellanea liturgica in honorem L. Cunitberti Mohlberg* (Rome, 1948), I, 190. C. Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, vol. VIII, pt. 2 of *The Excavations at Dura Europos, Final Report*, ed. C. Bradford Welles (New Haven, Conn., 1967).

⁴⁵Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, 58.

⁴⁶The first five items are taken from the chart published by Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, 79.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 58.

⁴⁸Kraeling, *The Christian Building*.

⁴⁹My watercolor reconstruction of this ceiling can be found in C. Hemans, "Fresco Reconstruction," fig. 4; J. Wiseman, "Multidisciplinary Research in Classical Archaeology: An Example from the Balkans,"

From examination of the decorative programs of these early baptisteries, we can draw some conclusions about the iconography of the images chosen for the baptistery, the building that was in many ways the heart of the early church. First, the evangelists were chosen because they recorded the story of the life of Christ. Significantly, at both Stobi and Naples they hold their Gospel books, while in the Orthodox Baptistry at Ravenna the books alone are present.

At Stobi, the scene of the blind man is placed just to the right of the representation of St. Matthew. Matthew's Gospel, as noted earlier, is one of the primary sources for this miracle, and this placement is surely not accidental. Further, the inscription on the building in this scene also relates this miracle to the Gospel of Matthew, for it is this Gospel that records healing miracles as taking place in the temple precinct at Jerusalem. In the Gospel book of St. Augustine, described above, the frontispiece to the Gospel of St. Luke shows the saint seated within an architectural framework and flanked by small scenes from the life of Christ as described in Luke. It is exactly this system that may also have existed at Stobi, for the semidome containing St. Matthew within his arch is flanked on the right by the miracle of the healing of the blind man, in the version that most closely follows that from the Gospel of St. Matthew. As discussed above, the scenes on the walls between the semidomes are smaller in scale and were placed in registers, one on top of the other, just as they are found in the Gospel book of St. Augustine.

Are the preserved scenes from the cupola of the Naples baptistery positioned in a particular relation to the symbols of the evangelists in that building? Above the symbol of Matthew is the Giving of the Laws, or *Traditio Legis*, and to the right the scene of Christ walking on the water. Both of these scenes are primarily related to the Gospel of St. Matthew. Those above John are all destroyed, and the only one left above Mark is the scene of the Marys at the tomb, which is treated in each of the Gospels. Above the symbol of Luke are two scenes, the Samaritan woman at the well and the miracle of the wine at the wedding at Cana, both from the Gospel of John, not Luke. Exact correspondence, then, is not present at Naples, although it does seem, in the case of Matthew, that above his symbol an effort was made to portray scenes that are emphasized in his Gospel.

At Naples and Dura, as de Bruyne and Maier point out, baptistery decoration focused on water symbolism.⁵⁰ Both show Christ walking on the water and the Samaritan woman at the well. And at Naples, the wedding at Cana, where water was changed to wine, is also shown. While no water scenes survive from among the painted images at Stobi, the mosaic floor contained four sets of animals drinking from *kantharoi*, one beneath each semidome.⁵¹ Two scenes contain deer, or harts, one on each side of a *kantharos*. Harts drinking from fountains are described as symbols of the evangelists by St. Jerome in the prologue to his commentary on St. Matthew.⁵² The presence of four deer would seem to reinforce this interpretation as related to the Stobi baptistery. At Stobi, then, the mosaic

in *Contributions to Aegean Archaeology: Studies in Honor of William A. McDonald* (Dubuque, Iowa, 1985), fig. 12; Wiseman, "Stobi," 402, fig. 9; and W. Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb: Imitation and Discontinuity in Fourth-Century Roman Painting* (University Park, Pa., 1986), fig. 113.

⁵⁰De Bruyne, "La décoration," 192–95; Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, 38–42.

⁵¹Kolarik, "The Floor Mosaics of Stobi," 122, 126, fig. 275.

⁵²P. Underwood, "The Fountain of Life," *DOP* 5 (1950), 71–72. The text of St. Jerome's commentary can be found in PL 24:15–22.

floor seems to be reflective of the iconographic program chosen for the painted walls. In the Naples baptistery, drinking deer appear in the cupola mosaics themselves, further reinforcing the idea that at Stobi they were meant to be viewed as part of the iconographic program of the baptistery.⁵³

Naturally, all this water symbolism is directly related to the water of the baptismal pool. Scenes such as the healing of the blind were meant to symbolize the enlightenment provided by the baptismal rite. De Bruyne concludes that the emphasis of baptistery decorative schemes was overwhelmingly on the positive—on miracles, including healing miracles and on themes of regeneration—while the more negative aspects, such as the cleansing of sins, are rarely depicted. In fact, though, the Dura baptistery presents us with an interesting case in this regard. The small scene of Adam and Eve, located at the lower left corner of the scene containing the Good Shepherd, seems clearly to have been added at a later date.⁵⁴ C. Kraeling sees this as an emendation of the iconographic program, probably as a result of objections to the program as originally conceived. It is an emendation that does introduce an emphasis precisely upon redemption and the cleansing of sins—for Adam and Eve have clearly already sinned (they are holding leaves in front of themselves).

Study of the Naples baptistery throughout the twentieth century has led to many theories about the missing mosaic panels, and they bring up an interesting issue that should be mentioned here. Some of the theories propose that scenes from the entire life of Christ were present, including an annunciation and a nativity. J. Wilpert, for example, proposed an annunciation, a baptism, and two miracles, while W. N. Schumacher preferred to reconstruct scenes from Christ's public life and then an ascension.⁵⁵ Maier prefers a baptism and then, after the scene of Cana, Christ's first miracle, three healing miracles (the paralytic, the blind man, and the deaf mute). The remaining scenes, however, are not in order, so that a chronological sequence cannot be intended, only a series of scenes from the life of Christ that were particularly associated with baptism. It seems most likely, then, from the surviving evidence, that only scenes from Christ's later life were chosen to decorate baptisteries.

In the third-century baptistery at Dura Europos, as noted above, some Old Testament scenes parallel those from the New Testament. The scene of David and Goliath at Dura, though, is not attested in any other surviving baptistery. At Naples, no Old Testament scenes are found, nor have any been found at Stobi. Both baptisteries, of course, have missing images, and, in the case of the Stobi baptistery, very little indeed survives.⁵⁶ Scenes from both the Old and the New Testaments are very common in the catacomb paintings associated with baptismal scenes and in sarcophagi containing such scenes. Old Testament images are found as well in the Orthodox Baptistery at Ravenna, though they

⁵³ Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, 132–40.

⁵⁴ Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, 49, 55, 202.

⁵⁵ Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, 58–69; J. Wilpert, *Die Römischen Mosaiken und Malerei der kirchlichen Bauten vom IV. bis XIII. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg, 1916), 216–30; W. N. Schumacher, "Dominus legem dat," *RQ* 54 (1959), 26.

⁵⁶ Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*, 79, considers the Naples baptistery to be "the product of an epoch of transition." The scenes that correspond most closely to those of Dura are for the most part confined to the cupola, while those that exhibit a "new spirit," the apostles and symbols of the evangelists, are arranged below.

are confined to the small stuccoes in Zone II; the emphasis of the decorative program is clearly on the New Testament, with the baptism of Christ in the cupola and the circle of apostles below, culminating in the *Traditio Legis*.⁵⁷ So far, at Stobi, no scenes from the Old Testament have been identified in either the baptistery or in the Episcopal Basilica itself.

What other scenes may have been painted on the walls of the Stobi baptistery? From a survey of contemporary baptisteries, it appears likely that many of the scenes were taken from the New Testament, and that these scenes may have been located on the walls next to the images of the evangelists, from whose texts the scenes were derived. Likely to have been present are more miracle scenes, a baptism, an image of the Good Shepherd, and perhaps the *Traditio Legis*. It is even possible that some type of garden scene was present at Stobi; in the remains of the scene above that of Christ on the east wall, a large area of mottled green with a fencelike diagonal grid appears. If this does represent a garden, it would parallel the Garden of Paradise scene identified by Kraeling at Dura and the four rivers of Paradise in the mosaics of the Naples baptistery.⁵⁸ What is certainly clear is that the wall paintings from the baptistery of the Episcopal Basilica fit very well into the previously known body of decorative subjects from baptisteries.

R. M. Jensen's study of the rite of baptism included examination of catacomb paintings, sarcophagi, and minor arts as well as the surviving decorative programs of early baptisteries themselves.⁵⁹ Jensen studied scenes found in the catacombs next to obviously baptismal scenes, that is, scenes containing the baptisms either of Christ himself or of a neophyte Christian, perhaps the occupant of the tomb. Baptismal imagery was most likely used in funerary contexts to make clear that the deceased had been baptized and was thus assured eternal life. Images juxtaposed with baptism scenes in the catacomb paintings are taken from both the Old and the New Testaments. Old Testament scenes include Adam and Eve, Moses striking water from the rock, the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, Jonah and the whale, Jonah under the gourd tree, Job in misery, Daniel in the lions' den, and Noah and the ark. New Testament scenes include baptismal scenes, banquet (eucharistic) scenes, fishermen, gravediggers, healing miracles (paralytic, blind man, Lazarus, woman with issue of blood), multiplication of loaves and fishes, the tempest-tossed ship, walking on the water, the annunciation, the three magi, the Good Shepherd, and Christ as teacher or philosopher. While one of the latter scenes is obviously appropriate only for tombs (the gravediggers), the striking correspondence of the remaining scenes makes study of the catacomb images and their relation to baptismal iconography quite useful. With very few exceptions, then (the gravediggers and Job), we can recognize images that appear to be particularly appropriate for association with baptismal rites; many are found in the baptisteries discussed here. One notable exception is Moses striking water from the rock, which would seem an obvious choice for a baptismal role but is not found in the baptisteries. The appropriateness of baptismal imagery is reinforced by association of baptismal imagery and tomb images.⁶⁰ This association is

⁵⁷ Kostof, *Orthodox Baptistry*, 94–95, 99.

⁵⁸ Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, 65–67, 167, 209.

⁵⁹ R. M. Jensen, "Living Water: Images, Settings, and Symbols of Christian Baptism in the West" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1991).

⁶⁰ Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, 191–95. Tronzo, *The Via Latina Catacomb*, 62 n. 42, even postulates that baptistery decoration may have directly influenced decoration and structural layout in the Via Latina catacomb.

well attested, not least by the paintings in the Dura baptistery, in which a large part of the wall is dedicated to the scene that depicts, in Kraeling's view, five women outside the tomb and then the same five women inside the tomb next to the empty sarcophagus.⁶¹ Baptisteries themselves, and their piscinas as well, are often octagonal, consciously referring to Roman tomb architecture, such as Diocletian's tomb at his palace at Split and Theodoric's mausoleum in Ravenna. Baptism is, as the liturgical writings often express, a symbolic death and rebirth in Christ. Further, burials often took place in baptisteries, though this practice was later banned by the church. A number of burials are associated with the Stobi baptistery.⁶²

Baptism clearly played a major role in the rites of the early church. As we have seen, at Dura only the baptistery of the house-church was decorated, and there is no evidence that any other room used for religious purposes was ever decorated.⁶³ Can we learn anything further about the purposes of baptistery decorations by examining the evidence for the rites themselves? While very few artworks show the rite in an architectural setting, there is some written testimony. The first detailed testimony about the ritual of baptism is that of Hippolytus in the third century.⁶⁴ Hippolytus describes a long and involved procedure, beginning with bathing on Holy Thursday, fasting on Friday, a ceremony of exorcism by the bishop on Saturday, and then a night of instruction and listening to readings, before proceeding to the baptismal water early on Easter Sunday. Hippolytus specifies that children are to be baptized first, then men, and finally women.

At Dura, the processional character of the scene of the women at the tomb has long been noted, so much so that an alternative interpretation is the procession of the wise and foolish virgins, discounted by Kraeling but repeated by T. M. Mathews as recently as 1993.⁶⁵ What is significant about the style chosen for the Dura scene may actually be that it is meant to parallel the procession of women into the baptistery for the rite itself. (The women visited the tomb, after all, on the original Easter Sunday.) This interpretation would seem to leave out the men, who should have been baptized first, if Hippolytus' order was being followed. But the men may be here, symbolically, and closer to the font, for the scene directly above the font shows the Good Shepherd and his flock, which consists exclusively of rams. The flock of rams may symbolize the group of men present for baptism, ahead of the women, who are symbolically present in the form of the women at the tomb on the side wall. St. Augustine, in *The City of God*, refers to a baptistery with separate sides for men and women. More direct evidence of such an arrangement in art can be found in the Pola casket, which shows men on one side and women on the other side of a curtained baptistery.⁶⁶

In both the Arian and the Orthodox baptisteries at Ravenna, a procession of disciples proceeds around the central image in the dome, a baptism of Christ. Here the saints themselves may be representing the neophytes present for baptism. At Naples, the lower zone contains figures identified as saints, holding crowns, who appear to be walking, and

⁶¹ Kraeling, *The Christian Building*, 191–95.

⁶² Jensen, "Living Water," 371–73. For the baptistery burials, see Wiseman and Mano-Zissi, "Stobi, 1971," 422.

⁶³ Jensen, "Living Water," 40.

⁶⁴ P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1993), 11.

⁶⁵ Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, 153.

⁶⁶ *Civ. Dei* 22.8; Jensen, "Living Water," 250–52.

these once again may represent those present for baptism.⁶⁷ At Stobi, it is possible that the rows of standing figures on either side of each evangelist may be seen as fulfilling this function, especially since a group of figures from the southwest semidome may include women. The painting is very badly damaged, and many areas have completely flaked off, but some figures do appear to have draped heads.⁶⁸ The figures flanking the evangelist Matthew in the northeast semidome, it should be remembered, are specifically referred to as the congregation, *laos*. At Stobi the figures around each evangelist may be more closely associated with another aspect of the baptismal rite mentioned by Hippolytus: the readings conducted by the officiating bishop during the night before the baptismal ceremony.⁶⁹ The evangelists holding their Gospel books embody the importance of those readings conducted by the bishop during the baptismal rite. At Stobi, too, there were actual painted excerpts from the Scriptures, as is proved by the presence of the single word ΦΗΜΙ from the east wall. This reinforces the possibility that actual ceremonial readings from the Scriptures, which are known to have taken place as part of the baptismal ceremony, are paralleled in the decorative program of the Stobi baptistery. It therefore seems that there may be a conscious attempt to parallel the ceremonial aspect of the baptismal rite in early baptisteries, either the procession to the baptismal font or the reading of the Scriptures.

While there is a strong unity of design throughout the Stobi baptistery, the same cannot be said of the style. For while I have established that the smaller-scale painting from the east wall, and the image of Christ from the west wall, appear to be very close in style to Theodosian art, these paintings are very different from those decorating the semidomes of the building. In the smaller-scale scenes the paint is applied in very thin layers, so that in some places the background paint shows through. The faces are composed of a limited number of brush strokes, creating an almost "impressionistic" appearance. In the semidomes, the paint is applied in thick layers, creating an appearance of dense opacity. In addition, small brush strokes are often added to each face in the form of shading, such as in the cheek area. While the figures in the east wall share the soft features of Theodosian art, those of the northeast semidome have harder edges, with a good deal of outlining (observe the hand of the figure to the right of St. Matthew) and stiffer, more hieratic poses.

Kitzinger might choose to explain the differences in these two representations by utilizing his theory of "modes."⁷⁰ According to this theory, different styles of depiction of subjects could be deliberately chosen for their associative impact on the viewer. That is, the very style itself was intended to enhance the theme being depicted. Kitzinger cites as an example the use of an "epic mode" for some of the scenes in mosaic from S. Maria Maggiore, executed in the 430s.⁷¹

Another explanation that might be postulated is that the artists were using different models for their works, perhaps in the form of painted miniatures. The model for "the evangelist," then, could be one definite type, and that for depictions of Christ quite an-

⁶⁷ Maier, *Le Baptistère de Naples*.

⁶⁸ C. Hemans, "Late Antique Wall Painting," 81.

⁶⁹ Cramer, *Baptism and Change*, 11.

⁷⁰ E. Kitzinger, *Byzantine Art in the Making* (Cambridge, 1977), 71–75, 87, 96.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

other. At Stobi, however, as we have seen, it is not only the appearance that is different, but even the method of application of paint. This leads inevitably to the conclusion that the different styles indicate two different artists working side by side in the Stobi baptistery. If indeed the paintings are of Theodosian date, it is tempting to think of one artist as having been trained in Constantinople and perhaps even as accompanying Theodosius to Stobi in 388.

We are fortunate to possess another example that is very close in date to these circumstances of creation: in the hypogeum of S. Maria in Stelle, near Verona, two very distinct styles of painting are found on the walls. It is worth quoting at some length Dorigo's summation of his study of the two artists' production:

This first artist of S. Maria in Stelle may safely be considered to have worked at the end of the fourth century and in the very early fifth. He shows a provincial style, unassuming and linear, but with much reference to the art of the Theodosian age and its successor; a style in some respects (e.g. the utilization of line to function as a substitute for corporeality) akin to the manner of the lunette of Christ among the Apostles at S. Aquilino.

The large lunette of the Apostolic College at S. Maria in Stelle is undoubtedly by another hand, quite probably of a later date and certainly more individual and creative.⁷²

S. Maria in Stelle presents a remarkable parallel to the Stobi baptistery, and although Dorigo feels that the two artists did not work at the same time there, he does not rule out that possibility. At Stobi, the painter of the east wall, as we have seen, painted in a style that owes much to Theodosian art, while the painter of the northeast semidome painted in a more linear, proto-Byzantine style.

In general, the picture provided by the evidence of wall paintings from the baptistery and from other buildings at Stobi is in accordance with that provided by mosaics and by architectural sculpture: the work was executed mainly by local workshops with occasional metropolitan craftsmen. R. Kolarik believes that the exceptionally finely constructed and costly materials of some of the mosaics from the Episcopal Basilica indicate metropolitan craftsmanship.⁷³ The majority of the Stobi mosaics, on the other hand, she believes, were the products of local artists. Similarly, F. Hemans' petrographic analysis of the stones used in the manufacture of architectural sculpture shows that, while most of the stones were quarried and worked locally, some were definitely imported (the island of Thasos has been identified as one source).⁷⁴ The paintings from the Stobi baptistery would seem to confirm the picture formed by the evidence from other workshops, in stone and mosaic—that of mostly local workshops with occasional importation of luxury materials, and perhaps artists, from metropolitan centers.

At a later date, probably during the sixth century, the baptistery paintings described here were summarily whitewashed and replaced with crudely painted, mostly nonfigural designs. In the northeast semidome, where once St. Matthew had presided, a large, red-orange Latin cross now hung (Fig. 5). Adorning the cross were large round white "jewels" and a gray vine or ribbon curled around it. Flanking the cross on the right stood two candelabra or flaming torches in trumpet-shaped stands. While it was once believed that

⁷² Dorigo, *Late Roman Painting*, 261, pls. 211–14.

⁷³ Kolarik, "The Floor Mosaics of Stobi," 526–38.

⁷⁴ F. Hemans, "Late Antique Residences," 258–59.

no figural compositions could be assigned to this painting phase, one small head, very carelessly executed in mostly gray paint, probably does belong (Fig. 6). This painting phase may be attributable to the increasing power of the iconoclastic movement, which already in the fifth century had considerable influence.

The observation that the second phase painting was considerably cruder may be said to have been based on subjective judgment. More objective evidence is available, however, in the form of paint pigment analysis. Blue pigment from the first phase paintings was made from azurite, a rare and rather expensive pigment, while that from the later repainting proved to be made from crushed glass.⁷⁵ Certainly it could be expected that artists associated with imperial workshops would have much greater access to rare pigments. In any case, whatever the intent of the artists who repainted the baptistery, their actions had, ironically, the effect of better preserving the earlier paintings until their discovery in the twentieth century.

The paintings from the baptistery of the Episcopal Basilica at Stobi make available an outstanding new series of images to aid in the study of Christian iconography during late antiquity. While the paintings fit very well into the previously known body of decorative subjects from baptisteries, they have also added new elements, such as the unique setting of the scene from the east wall. Furthermore, the style of the paintings makes a significant new contribution to the study of Theodosian art, this time in painted form.

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⁷⁵The blue pigment that appears to consist of crushed glass could have been a manufactured blue pigment, commonly known as "Egyptian blue," that was widely distributed throughout the ancient Mediterranean area. Pigment analysis was undertaken using a scanning electron microscope at the laboratories of Eastern Analytic, Inc., Burlington, Massachusetts, operated by Drew Kilius, and at the laboratories of Clarkson University, Potsdam, New York.